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Paris Was Our Mistress

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Gilberto Freyre: THE MASTERS AND THE SLAVES:

A STUDY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRAZILIAN

CIVILIZATION

SAMUEL PUTNAM

PARIS

Was Our Mistress

MEMOIRS OF A LOST
& FOUND GENERATION

*Die Krähen schrein
Und ziehen schwirren Flugs zur Stadt:
Bald wird es schnein,
Weh dem, der keine Heimat hat!*

NIETZSCHE

New York

THE VIKING PRESS

1947

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FIRST PUBLISHED BY THE VIKING PRESS IN MAY 1947

PUBLISHED ON THE SAME DAY IN THE DOMINION OF CANADA

BY THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA LIMITED

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

BY VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC.

To the Members of the Nonexistent, Always Existing

Left Bank Club;

To Pascal Covici, Who Made the Experience Possible;

and

To Riva and Hilary, Who Saw It Through.

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Paris Was Our Mistress

By Way of Prologue

HERE are times when it all comes back to me in a kind of Salvador Dali nightmare. Something occurs to bring it back. It may be merely a sleepless night when the latest Crime Club selection has failed to do its work and the mind starts traveling in the direction of the past. It may be something else: a clipping in my scrapbook; a letter, already showing signs of age, that I have come upon in my files and that gives me somewhat the feeling of having encountered a ghost; a news item in the papers; the notice of a book that has just been published by an old Left Bank acquaintance; a painting exhibit in Fifty-seventh Street that recalls the raucous days and rowdier nights of the Saint-Germain-des-Prés quarter and the boulevard du Montparnasse.

It may be a chance meeting at a Manhattan cocktail party, in a Greenwich Village tavern, or along Fifth Avenue, with someone whom I last had seen in that blaring era, the late 'twenties, when, over our *fines-à-l'eau* at Jimmy the Barman's, we had adjourned a violent discussion—what was it about, anyway? Fernand Léger and machine-age art? James Joyce and the interior monologue? *transition* and the "Revolution of the Word"? What? Self-consciously, laughingly, we try to remember. Whatever it was, it was quite important at the time, a matter of vital importance to those "expatriates," those "exiles," who had fled the America of Harding and Coolidge and the Bible Belt, of Sinclair Lewis, James Branch Cabell, and Anita Loos, precisely in order that they might be able to devote themselves to such questions as these.

I pick up a newspaper: Ezra Pound on trial for treason as

psychiatrists wrangle over his degree of sanity—I think of my first glimpse of Ezra, his Byronic sport shirt and straw-colored beard, filling the doorway of our cramped little apartment in the rue Delambre, around the corner from the *café du Dôme*. I have a vision of him lying on his sunny terrace at Rapallo, composing his *Cantos* . . .

Willy Seabrook a suicide—there was that evening when he came to my place and insisted that we go out in search of a cannibalistic meal, a dinner of human flesh, which he assured me was to be found in Paris . . .

I open the *New York Times* to the Sunday art page, and a headline brings me the news that Joseph Stella, one of the first, fighting modernists, is dead. At once I am back in his Montparnasse studio, posing for my portrait throughout the long afternoon, listening to his pungent comments. Or we are at the entrance to the *Dôme* on a certain New Year's morning as Joe and another painter wage a memorable duel with their walking sticks.

Ford Madox Ford, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein—I read their death notices, one after another, as the years go by, and each brings back a throng of memories. Before she died, I have seen Miss Stein become, if not a best-seller, a fair-selling success, whose prose the ordinary citizen no longer finds too strange. Hemingway, almost old-hat now to the younger ones, commutes from his home in Havana to the Stork Club, or so the gossip-columnists tell me. Louis Aragon, having emerged as the poet of the French Resistance, is an active Communist Party functionary. Picasso likewise has been converted to the creed of Moscow, while André Derain has been accused of being a collaborationist, and Marc Chagall, having made his peace with the Soviets, after a brief exile in America goes back to his native Russia. Valéry, of whom we saw little but who, none the less, was one of our *animateurs*, is no more. André Gide remains, however, as does Jean Cocteau (does he still smoke the opium pipe?); after being under an undeserved

cloud for a while, they are seen to be carrying on still the great tradition that they represent; they are among the few recognizable landmarks in the after-war scene, where Jean-Paul Sartre and his Existentialists and other new men and movements hold the center of the stage.

A generation is passing, there can be no doubt of that, one that made literary and art history in its day. A generation tragic and deeply troubled as were few that had gone before. And it was one that, whether Continental or American, found its home in Paris, immemorial city of refuge for the outcast and the rebel. In Paris, and on Paris's historic Left Bank, where for the past thousand years, ever since the time of Charlemagne, men have gathered to think and talk, to wrangle over intellectual and spiritual matters, and, on more than one occasion, to die for their beliefs.

The story of this generation is not Europe's alone; it forms a part of America's annals, both social and cultural. Never before in history had there been such a mass migration of writers and artists from any land to a foreign shore. For a decade and more, Paris was a good deal nearer than New York or Chicago to being the literary capital of the United States, as far as earnest and significant writing was concerned. It was the "Work in Progress" (later to become *Finnegans Wake*) by the Irish Joyce, it was *Tender Buttons* and *The Sun Also Rises*, over against *Babbitt* and *Jurgen* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. And who today can doubt which it was, on the whole, the "exiles" or the stay-at-homes, who contributed most in the way of positive direction to American letters of the past two decades?

It was a noisy, sensation-loving epoch, and these young Americans of the Rive Gauche had their full share of publicity, sought and unsought. Their frequently weird-seeming works and aesthetic "revolutions" created a furor such as the wildest Surrealist scarcely could hope to achieve today, and they were a fair target for the newspaper columnist and quipster even as

they rapidly became collector's items. Meanwhile, in this period of prohibition gin and the "wild party" at home in America, lurid tales were told of the life they led in the general vicinity of the café du Dôme and the café Select, some of which were exaggerated while others fell far short of the truth.

It is really surprising that no one has set this whole story down in print, for it is one that, for the sake of the record, ought to be preserved—both the literary-artistic and the human side of it. We have heard much of the "lost generation" that resulted from the disorientation, not to say chaos, that followed World War I; and now that we are in the trough of World War II, it may be worth our while to study the causes, manifestations, and consequences of the expatriate movement of the 1920's. In his *Exile's Return* (published in 1934), Malcolm Cowley has made an extremely valuable contribution to the chronicle, but has given us only a partial and, by intent, a highly personalized, view, covering chiefly the beginnings of the movement in the early 'twenties. My report may perhaps supplement the earlier, incomplete ones, inasmuch as it deals largely with the period from 1926 to 1933, the years during which, whatever the quality of the *émigrés* as compared with their predecessors, the bulk of the migration came.

This is not, then, just another book about Paris. For the past hundred years, literally hundreds of such books have been written, and there would seem to be little point in adding to their number, unless one can tell as unusual and charming a story as Elliot Paul has told in *The Last Time I Saw Paris*. (Paul, by the way, could well have been the historian of the exile decade, had he chosen.) This is, rather, a book about a generation *in Paris*. That it would have been the same generation anywhere else is inconceivable; for the city by the Seine inevitably colored its life and work and shaped its destiny. Paris always does that. There is no such thing as a Paris that everyone knows, that may be captured and put into a guide-

book or a volume of whimsical reminiscences, for the benefit of the tourist or curiosity-seeker. It is always *somebody's Paris*. It always has been and always will be.

Accordingly, the present work will of necessity be in good part autobiographical, reflecting the formative period of my life and the Paris that I saw through my own eyes and those of my contemporaries. It is essentially the story of our youth, and I can only hope that too much of tired and elderly wisdom will not have crept into the telling—only so much as may be needed to illumine the moral at the end. The Paris that we knew was not the “gay Paree” of light-opera tradition. It was sometimes gay, more often sad; for the gaiety, the light-heartedness, of youth is vastly overestimated, and while we may have been a roistering lot, we were by no means always as carefree as we seemed. Whatever else it may have been, Paris—our Paris—was full of life and zest and color, as well as weariness, disillusionment, and despair; and it is this Paris that I have tried to portray here. The Paris that was our spiritual mistress, a wise and beautiful one, at a time when our own America, or so it seemed, had turned a strumpet.

When I think back, it is hard to know where to begin, and the pieces of a weird jigsaw puzzle start tumbling about my head, *Alice in Wonderland* fashion (for was not Alice a “precursor” of the Surrealists, as Louis Aragon used to maintain?). It is difficult to bring some kind of realistic order out of it all. Perhaps the best way is to begin at the beginning: how and why we came to be there.

I

Background to Flight

I. THE MAKING OF AN EXPATRIATE

WHAT is an expatriate? For most Americans, addicted to that rugged isolationism that flowered in the nineteenth century to find a literary expression in such a work as *Innocents Abroad*, the word has always held a more or less unsavory connotation. So America is not good enough for you, eh? The implication being that there must be something wrong with such an individual: he must be at best a weakling, if indeed he does not have some hidden vice or other shameful secret to conceal from his countrymen which leads him to seek refuge with immoral foreigners, the French for instance. Such an attitude, I recall, was widespread in my boyhood as Theodore Roosevelt thundered from the White House against "hyphenated Americans." It all went with the Big Stick, the "strenuous life," Teddy's toothsome "dee-lighted" grin, his play-the-game-square-but-hit-the-line-hard philosophy, and the like; and if this was at the same time the era of the Platt Amendment and the Marines in Nicaragua, the average citizen was not conscious of any contradiction. I recall how, when I used to long for a glimpse of the Old World, my parents would quote to me the railway advertising slogan: See America First. It represented the thinking of the great American masses, especially those of the Midwest and the Far West.

No, in the last decades of the nineteenth and the early years of the present century they did not care for cosmopolitans, and even the more cultivated were inclined to reprove or to lament Henry James, whose indictment against America was that it had "no sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristoc-

racy, no church, no clergy, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches. . . .”

It was, perhaps, James, Whistler, Sargent, who first made America intellectually aware of expatriation as a literary-artistic phenomenon. Not that they are the first cases to be found or that the problem was not there long before their time; but American criticism in those days was a feeble thing, and the reading public was not concerned with the “ordeal” of Henry James, Henry Adams, Mark Twain, Emily Dickinson, or William Dean Howells: that inner struggle that, from Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper to T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, and Ezra Pound, has been waged within the writer’s creative mind, at odds with its environment or torn between allegiances.

That there has been such a struggle, no one can doubt who has made anything more than the most superficial study of American literature. “The first ambassador whom the New World of letters sent to the Old” was Thackeray’s description of Washington Irving. It is a fairly accurate one and unwittingly lays stress upon a significant point: the essentially colonial spirit that inspired our literary beginnings (read over once again those words of Henry James). Colonialism is the root of cultural expatriation, whether in North America, Spanish America, or Portuguese-speaking Brazil. Irving, our first important writer following the achievement of nationhood, was a little too much the ambassador, a little too aware of his role and position, and uncertain, moreover, as to where his ultimate loyalties as a man of letters lay. The dichotomy shows in his work; but whether he is writing of the Alhambra or the Catskills, he remains the disciple of the eighteenth-century Addison and Steele, British in inspiration and careful always of the proprieties of his prose.

The American theme in itself does not assure an undivided

spirit or an undivided art. Who could be more American in subject matter than Cooper; yet as a novelist what does he not owe to Sir Walter Scott and other European models? The truth of the matter is that, thoroughly American as he may seem to us, the author of the *Leather-Stocking Tales* passed through a very real crisis upon his return from his Continental travels, as may be seen in *The Monikins* and *Home As Found*. If one looks closely enough at other American writers of the first half and middle of the last century, he will find in almost all of them the signs of this conflict, if only in the form of an intense reaction against the Old World and its culture. Speaking out of Transcendentalism for an America and a class that were attaining an ever increasing degree of creature-comfort, Ralph Waldo Emerson might breakfast on New England pie and sit down to pen an essay on "Self-Reliance"; yet the shadow of that other, transatlantic world was with him just as surely as it was to be with the creator of *Huckleberry Finn*. There is, of course, Thoreau; he would seem to have been the least aware of any conflict, unless it was the Quaker-abolitionist Whittier or that traveled linguist, Longfellow, whose themes are now European, now American, but who, on the whole, remains untouched by this as by the other deeper complexities of life. As for Melville, his continent is a metaphysical one, though his prose is that of his Puritan forebears, the prose of the seventeenth century and the King James Version. On the other hand, one could not say that Hawthorne, the "American Hamlet" who gave us *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Marble Faun*, was unscathed by the dilemma; nor could it be said of the later Lowell, after the ardent abolitionist of the *Biglow Papers* had given way to the author of the "Birmingham Address." And Walt Whitman, poet of American democracy: what of him? The very ecstasy and anguish, bordering on the dithyrambic, of his revolt, his quest for the new and utterly American word, should give us the answer.

Expatriation does not of necessity imply taking boat for

foreign shores. There were those who, unlike Irving and James, could not afford it, or who for one reason or another preferred to remain here. One can be an expatriate without leaving his native soil. What of those stay-at-home fugitives, Sarah Orne Jewett and Emily Dickinson? The one found haven in a spinster's New England, the other in the solitude of her study and the searching of her woman's heart; yet both were fleeing the same increasingly urban and industrial, the same "ugly," civilization that Henry James disliked so heartily and that led Howells and Adams first to investigate and then to forswear Karl Marx and socialism.

One could go on. The problem is not a new one, it is basically a cultural problem that has been with us from the start. It is significant that the subject should first have been brought vividly to the consciousness of Americans in the 1880's and the 1890's; for this was the era when, following the second Grant administration and the rise of the Tweed Ring in New York City, under Rutherford B. Hayes and his successors, American monopoly capitalism and with it American imperialism were being born. Professors of economics have a word for it. They tell us that what was taking place was the combination of banking and industrial capital to form finance capital: in other words, the rise of Wall Street. And Wall Street . . . Listen to Lafcadio Hearn:

Fancy a good romance about Wall Street, so written that the public could understand it! There is of course a tremendous romance there; but only a financier could really know machinery, and his knowledge is technical. But what can the mere *littérateur* do, walled up in a world of mathematical mystery?

The New York scene impressed Hearn as "frightful, nightmarish, devilish," and led him to exclaim: "Civilization is a hideous thing. Blessed is savagery!" The Gauguin motive; but Hearn had tried the primitive life and had given it up. Even

his beloved Japan was fast becoming industrialized. "Civilization is a fraud." But for him there was no escape.

Hear the exotic; that pose-striking "unwashed savage," Ambrose Bierce; the aristocracy-worshiping Henry James; the Back Bay Henry Adams, loathing "this banker's world," this "banker's Olympus," and turning from capitalism to Marx and from Marx toward the Catholic Church; Whistler painting Thames nocturnes and jesting too facilely with Oscar Wilde; Sarah Orne Jewett in *Deephaven*; Emily Dickinson and her agonized choice; William Dean Howells flirting with Christian socialism, Marxism, Tolstoyanism, vegetarianism; Mark Twain writing *Life on the Mississippi* to pay his debts and hating Teddy Roosevelt and the Big Stick, yet guffawing like any vulgar Cook's tourist in the art galleries of Europe—what were all these if not the victims of a split and tortured personality that is with us to this day as we listen to the dia-tribes of Ezra Pound directed against the "commercial" American publisher and a public that cannot or will not appreciate the beauties and the rhythms of old Provence?

The plaint is a familiar one. It will be found in Henry James, with whom Pound has so many affinities, and in others of his generation, the so-called Gilded Age. It was not that the public did not care for "culture"; it did. It craved culture, but a culture of its own defining. It looked up to men of letters, as such, with almost superstitious awe, as beings apart; but it became annoyed and did not buy nor read books that it could not understand, novels that probed the complexities of the life of the mind and the delicate nuances of daily living, or poetry that did not resemble the *Idylls of the King*. It was, indeed, fresh ground that Stephen Crane was breaking with his slum girl, *Maggie*; but *Maggie* was at least comprehensible where *What Maisie Knew* or *The Golden Bowl* was not.

And so it was to be a few decades later. The public taste by that time might have broadened sufficiently on the side of content to be able to accept, and even make a best-seller of,

Main Street or *Babbitt*; but on the side of form, technique, it was not up to Joyce, Stein, Pound, or Eliot. These, above all Joyce, were the great incomprehensibles, fit subject for the newspaper columnists' gibes, and their "incomprehensibility" became an offense. This only increased the near-fanatic devotion of their followers, who now turned upon the Sinclair Lewises and their kind. Tempers were growing short. On the one hand, the expatriate or cosmopolitan was no longer merely an object of condescension when not of pity on the part of Americans at large; he was on the way to becoming an enemy; and on the other hand, the intellectual who had fled these shores was beginning to look upon himself as an "exile"—it was Pound who, in the 1920's, first gave currency to the term by employing it as the title of a small and very exclusive little magazine, edited from Rapallo, Italy, and published in its final phase, through my intermediation, on South Wabash Avenue, Chicago.

One thing to be noted in connection with the earlier generation of "exiles" is the fact that practically all of them came from the substantial middle class; they had a financial rating or could lay hands on sufficient funds to enable them to live abroad. Henry James's grandfather, like Irving's father, had made a fortune in business; Stein and Pound, who were to follow shortly, were in reality *rentiers*, and the same to a degree may be said of Eliot. In other words, it was business, however ugly, that made possible their escape from the civilization it created. It was not until after the First World War that the falling franc and the third-class tourist cabin brought to Paris's Left Bank a new type of American, one who, as a rule had a good deal less money than his predecessors in flight, and often little or none at all. This was to lead to a different kind of expatriate scene, with the genuine artist and writer hardly distinguishable on the café terrace from the cut-rate tourist and the first-cabin slummer out to take it all in. It was to result, likewise, in the creation of a species of aristocracy among the

"exiles," based not alone upon talent but also upon the length of time one had been away from America.

It is not surprising if exiles are unhappy; one expects them to be; and these American fugitives have been no exception. Even though he found there a court and aristocracy, castles, manors, thatched cots, ivied ruins, and all the rest, Henry James was not happy in England, in London; nor was he any more contented in Paris, where he found the men of his craft too self-centered, lacking in graciousness—they were not "*accueillants*." The truth is that the author who began but never finished *The Ivory Tower* was haunted always by the ghost of an all too corporeal America. Pound, likewise, was to be forever moving on, from London to Paris to Rapallo. This trait is another that was to show in the fevered generation of the 'twenties.

But still they came. It was the Mauve Decade that witnessed the first migration in any numbers, when painters, writers, architects, musicians began sailing for Europe, some to tarry amid the Mimos and the ateliers of Montparnasse, while others went on to Rome, Milan, Naples. Stifled by the stockyards atmosphere of Chicago, Henry Blake Fuller, who was to become one of America's finest and most neglected prose writers, embarked for Italy, traversed the peninsula in a phaeton, and wrote *The Chevalier of Pensieri Vani*. He returned to Chicago shortly and went into another sort of exile there, for many long years; for it was an exile, alleviated only by what James has called "the pale little art of fiction." In the opening years of the present century, Gertrude Stein, having completed her courses at Johns Hopkins and at Harvard, went to join her brother Leo in France. Pound, having rambled through Spain, Italy, and Provence, settled in London, about 1907. Eliot's expatriation was physically a more gradual affair, from the time he began his studies in philosophy and French literature at the Sorbonne, in 1910, to 1927, when he became a British subject, a monarchist, and an Anglo-Catholic; but it really

may be dated from the eve of the First World War and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.

The war of 1914-1918 had a profound effect upon American intellectuals, an effect which was first visible among those who stayed at home, and which took the form of an intense questioning of values and an impassioned search for native roots. This reaction was given literary expression by the group surrounding the *Seven Arts* magazine, including such writers as Sherwood Anderson, Conrad Aiken, Waldo Frank, Van Wyck Brooks, Louis Untermeyer, Alfred Kreymborg, and others, with Randolph Silliman Bourne emerging as the dominant figure, one whose full stature is only today becoming apparent, a quarter of a century after his premature death. Bourne's paper on "The War and the Intellectuals," published in the *Seven Arts* for July, 1917, has been described by his biographer, Louis Filler, as "the only analysis of that important subject written in America." No mere pacifist, though the pacifists might claim or use him, Bourne was opposed to the mentality that made possible America's entry into the conflict. There were times when he felt that he was living "at the end of an intellectual era." The *Seven Arts*, like the socialistic *Masses*, was soon silenced, suppressed by the censor, and the group about it was dispersed; but before this happened it had left its mark upon an era, even though it is chiefly remembered now by the literary historian and by the few who were associated with it or close to its influence.

Meanwhile, out of the blood and mire of the trenches and the experiences of a military prison, two American writers, John Dos Passos and E. E. Cummings, were to give us our first and finest war novels, in *Three Soldiers* and *The Enormous Room*. This was the answer to Alan Seeger and his famous "rendezvous." Every schoolmarm and school child had memorized that heroic bit of verse; it was part of the drive for American intervention in the war, in support of the mentality

that Randolph Bourne had condemned. Cummings and Dos Passos showed us what the true character of the rendezvous was, the latter from the hell of No Man's Land, the former from his prison barracks, where he had been confined for insubordination. With the exception of Barbusse's *Under Fire*, theirs are the first and last novels of the First World War that are worth bothering about until Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero*, which appeared some ten years later, with benefit of perspective. Other Americans were silent as far as any significant productions are concerned. It was a flare in the dark, like that represented in England by the poets Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, something of whose disillusionment was to be recaptured in the 1930's by Auden, Spender, Lewis, and their associates. In France, England, and America, writers were soon to turn from the war itself to the world that the war had left behind it; like the French Dadaists, they were to begin challenging the basic wisdom of their elders, who were responsible for it all.

Most of the Americans came back, many of them—Cowley, Josephson, Cummings, and others—to return to France a short while later as civilians and "exiles"; but a few stayed on and went native by marrying French girls, rearing French-speaking families, and, often, all but losing the use of their mother-tongue. An instance of this was George Rheims, whose novel, *An Elegant Peccadillo*, I translated for a New York publisher. During the war Rheims had been an artillery liaison officer with the French command. He had come to know the French and to love them and had decided to settle there. When I met him, he could still speak English, though not so fluently as his adopted language; but writing it was out of the question; hence his need of the services of a translator. (One New York reviewer found it hard to believe and thought the book a hoax on my part.) Rheims had made his place in French life, had a beautiful family and middle-class

home, and appeared to be quite happy. There was also William Aspenwall Bradley, who, taking a French wife, proceeded to build up a lucrative business as a literary agent (he had begun as a writer). Bradley, like Rheims, to a large extent became Gallicized, and Madame Bradley's salon on the aristocratic île-Saint-Louis was frequented by France's leading men of letters.

Not all were so fortunate as this, however. There were some who, unable to bring themselves to return to the States and without the means of a decent livelihood, became drifters, floating from one job to another where a knowledge of English might be in demand—provided they were able to procure the always difficult *carte de travail*, or labor-permit for foreigners. Not a few became bartenders and even pimps, race-track and prize-fight hangers-on, and the like. Their meeting place, when they were in funds, was Harry's Bar, near the place de l'Opéra, where they would encounter and mingle with the tourists from home. They seldom came to the Left Bank—indeed, they seemed rather to shun the company of American writers and artists—but formed a motley colony of their own, along with the touts, pugs, bartenders, pimps, tourist guides, gamblers, confidence men, and vendors of pornographic pictures who had swarmed over to France during the years immediately following the war. They all constituted a demimonde that was half French, half American, a sort of weird amalgam of Brooklyn and Montmartre. One thing they did have, or had acquired, was a feeling for the subtleties of French psychology and a command of the rich juicy idiom of the Parisian populace, the kind that you hear spoken by chauffeurs over their onion soup at Les Halles around five o'clock in the morning. In this respect, the literati of the Left Bank, whose French was for the most part execrable, could not compare with them. I have known high school "teachers" of French who upon leaving the boat train at the gare Saint-Lazare were unable to tell the taxi-driver where to take them.

It was a standing jest among us that the best French spoken by an American in Paris was to be heard from the Negro boot-black (point of origin Harlem) in the basement of the American Express Company's building in the rue Scribe.

The type of permanent expatriate that I have been describing was, of course, the exception, although there were more of these than one might think. The vast majority had sailed back past the Statue of Liberty after the Armistice, to be feted one day and forgotten the next, their old jobs gone in many cases and new ones scarce, and with no provision for their welfare and for the period of readjustment to civilian life. They were heroes, was not that enough? It is a story that is being repeated after the Second World War; but now there is at least some provision for veterans, some pretense of Governmental concern. The discontent of the ex-soldiers was accordingly to swell and grow for a decade, and was to culminate in the historic and tragic bonus march of the Hoover administration. Among the ex-servicemen were many writers, artists, and intellectuals who, while finding other, subtler, and deeper sources of unhappiness in the American postwar scene, could not but share the general resentment of the fighting men at a condition which was part of a larger picture of inflation, false prosperity, unemployment, and capital and labor strife.

The great steel strike of 1919, led by William Z. Foster, set many intellectuals looking toward the Left, a trend that was given impetus by the Russian Revolution, which for a number of years had a considerable effect, but one that is not to be unduly stressed, on the thinking of American liberals. This was due in good part to the vibrant, dramatic figure of John Reed. On the whole, the liberals were inclined to fear what Herbert Croly, writing in the *New Republic* at the time of the Kerensky revolution, called "the Jacobinism of war"; they feared that revolution was inevitable and could only hope that when it came it might be "tempered by law and healing in its effect." In the past they had endeavored to draw near the labor

movement, had participated in strikes and the struggle for civil liberties, had attended soap-box meetings in Washington Square, and had listened to the teachings of Emma Goldman; but their faith was about gone, their pessimism profound. John Reed himself, even as he sailed for Russia to witness the revolution, was close to giving up hope, as is clearly revealed in his little-known paper "Almost Thirty."

Reed was one of the world's great reporters, and in Russia his faith was galvanized into new life by the sheer drama of events; his *Ten Days That Shook the World* was the result and for a brief moment stirred the imagination of intellectuals back home. But when, upon his return to America, he stepped into his old familiar haunts in Greenwich Village, he found that they had not even missed him, much less read his articles. When told that he had been in Russia covering a revolution, they could only inquire languidly over the teacups: "Was it interesting, Jack?"

Such was the social-political climate that the soon-to-be exiles found upon their return from the war.

Politically and economically, things were going from bad to worse: Harding and the Ohio Gang, the carryings-on in the White House, Teapot Dome; inflation and a postwar boom followed by deflation and panic. They were deeply, painfully dissatisfied with the America that they saw about them, but would have liked to alter effects without probing too deeply into causes. Revolution was assuredly not the answer for these young middle-class intellectuals of the 1920's, any more than it was for those sons of the bourgeoisie, the French Dadaists. But if not revolution, what?

Culturally, were the prospects any more encouraging? Greenwich Village was no longer the "Bohemian" refuge it once had been; those who had formerly lived there saw it with different eyes upon their return from the battlefields of Europe. The essentially bourgeois-escapist character it had al-

ways had now visible and becoming all the time more accentuated. Commercial tearooms and similar enterprises were flourishing, rents were mounting, and the bond salesman and the advertising man were moving in. The creative atmosphere of the old Washington Square days was gone forever. While a number of real artists resided there still, their number was diminishing, and there was a growing tawdriness and falsity to the place. In any event, the gospel according to Maxwell Bodenheim seemed scarcely satisfying to those who had stood at Armageddon and battled for Wall Street's millions. In the meantime, miniature, imitation "Villages" were springing up all over the country, in Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Minneapolis, Cleveland, and elsewhere, and Freud and the *Interpretation of Dreams*, a recent discovery, were being widely utilized to explain and justify the throwing off of "bourgeois" inhibitions.

In the field of literature there were hopeful signs; and now that the *Seven Arts* was gone, Chicago appeared to be the center of activity. The famed "Chicago Renaissance," which had begun around 1912, or about the time that the British Imagists descended upon Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* magazine, was well under way by 1917; Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* and Sandburg's epoch-marking *Chicago Poems* had been published; Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Windy McPherson's Son* were being read and discussed; and from Springfield, Illinois, Vachel Lindsay was sounding his loud bassoon. Margaret Anderson and the *Little Review* and Maurice Browne and the Little Theater—note the recurrence of the adjective "little"—were catering to that portion of the intelligentsia that believed in making "no compromise with the public taste." In the East, popular attention was centered on Mencken and Nathan in the *Smart Set*, and Mencken a few years later was to go on and found the *American Mercury*, guffawing all the while at the "booboisie" and developing his nihilistic philosophy.

All these were signs that indicated a deepening discontent with American cultural and spiritual values. The revolt was of a mixed character, being marked on the one hand by a popular-democratic trend as in Anderson, Sandburg, and Lindsay, and on the other hand by a certain tendency to esotericism and a contempt for the art of the people that with Mencken and his followers became a contempt for the people themselves.

It was in the form of the novel, on the threshold of the 1920's, that the graver preoccupations and changing attitudes of thinking Americans began to be reflected most clearly; and it was out of the Midwest that the impulse came, with such works as *Windy McPherson's Son* and *Winesburg, Ohio* representing what Carl Van Doren has described as the "revolt from the village." It was, however, with Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* that this phase of the rebellion was crystallized for the large body of American readers. The best-selling success of *Main Street* probably astonished no one more than Mr. Lewis. A number of reasons have been advanced for the book's popularity; one that seems as logical as any other is that it voiced the disillusionment many a doughboy who had fought the "battle of Paris" felt when he saw his home town again. In any case, there can be no doubt that there existed a widespread dissatisfaction with the provincialism of American life as small-town morals and mores extended their influence to the cities in the form of Mr. Mencken's "Comstockery" and similar manifestations. Are not the Spoon River epitaphs a reflection of this? And is it strange, then, if those intellectuals living or congregating on Manhattan Island—which Mencken once suggested should declare its independence of the United States—were inclined to view the entire scene, including the rising school of "debunkers," as hopelessly provincial?

Coming more and more under the influence of Mencken and the Menckenites, Lewis was to write his *Babbitt*—Babbitt looking at Babbitt, as many saw it. But, as those who found

fault with the author might have perceived, that in itself was something; it was a great deal; it was something that could not have happened in an earlier period: the reading public was no longer afraid of seeing itself in a mirror.

The mirror was being held up now by a number of young writers—"young romantics," as Henry Seidel Canby dubbed them—with a far greater sensitivity than Lewis and with a gift for poetic expression in the novel. Indeed, it seemed as if "all the sad young men" had all at once sat down to put their sadness into creative prose. The early 'twenties saw a memorable harvest of such works in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*, Ben Hecht's *Erik Dorn*, Stephen Vincent Benét's *The Beginning of Wisdom*, and Floyd Dell's *Moon Calf*, to mention only the outstanding ones. The "flaming youth" generation, the sorrows of the undergraduate, love in Greenwich Village or in Chicago—were these writers romantics, or were they simply treating poetically an unpoetic reality? Though one or two of them, like Fitzgerald, may have had their brief fling in Europe, it is significant that none of them became "exiles" but stayed with America for good or ill, whatever the effect upon their art. Some of them, after a most promising start from the literary point of view, were to succumb to the lure of Hollywood (Hecht and Fitzgerald). Others, like Dell, were gradually to lapse into silence. Only a few, a very few, like the author of *John Brown's Body* and *Western Star*, stubbornly continued their efforts to hew out a meaning for this America of theirs. (It is worth noting that *John Brown's Body* was published in 1928, at the height of the Harding-Coolidge "prosperity era.") It was an uphill pull, calling for courage, vision, faith, and these qualities the spokesmen for disillusioned youth on the whole did not possess. They may not have chosen exile—but was Hollywood to be preferred?

Benét was not the only one who found and kept the faith, a faith in the human and aesthetic potentialities of America in spite of all its faults and sins and its weaknesses parading often

as its strength; Carl Sandburg, William Carlos Williams, Alfred Kreymborg, Langston Hughes, and one or two others carried on, their voices all but lost in the din that came from the chorus of debunkers as, with the approach of the 1928-1929 "prosperity" peak, American life and American literature grew seemingly all the while more false, more unreal.

It was a speakeasy generation, this one. As one of the best young poets of the time, Norman Macleod, was to put it retrospectively, in a volume which he at first significantly entitled *Exile Without Return* (later published as *Thanksgiving Before November*):

The philosophy of our time was written by bootleggers
And we went to the speakeasies for knowledge and hope
And the taste was bitter in our mouths. . . .
We were a wassail of sorrow. . . .
A speakeasy world this is and we
Are punchdrunk with weariness.

Prohibition, the speakeasy, Al Capone, the "flapper," bobbed hair, "flaming youth": these were the topics of the day. I recall how, as a reporter in Chicago, I had to do an elaborate series in defense of the flapper; and when a visitor came to town, we of the press had four stock queries, in order of importance:

- 1) What do you think of Chicago?
- 2) What do you think of prohibition?
- 3) What do you think of bobbed hair?
- 4) What do you think of the American flapper?

Is it any wonder if "we went to the speakeasies for knowledge and hope," or if "the taste was bitter in our mouths"?

If there was any escape to be found, it could only have been such a one as Kreymborg discovered, or invented; for it was about this time that he began wandering up and down the land, strumming his "mandolute" and drinking in the life of his fellow Americans. I remember hearing and seeing him in Chicago, at the old Dill Pickle Club. Leisurely, dreamy, gentle,

lovable, he was pretty much of an anomaly in those Harding days. A cultivated vagabond in an era when the picturesque nineteenth-century tramp, who was very much an anarchist and an individualist, had given way to the permanent unemployed on the park bench; a neo-Whitmanic loafer and soul-inviter in an age when other men were looking to Wall Street or the "curb" for get-rich-quick fortunes, he stood out against the blare and glare of this brassy epoch like some wandering Minnesinger of old, dedicated to the high cause of poetry and romance. He seemed a little odd to most people; but was he not, perhaps, wiser after all than the stock-market grubbers and those who were careful to keep up the payments on their life insurance? Granting that he was, we still could not all follow his example; we did not all have a mandolute, and we could not all turn vagabonds. No more than Maxwell Bodenheim, who constantly commuted between Greenwich Village and the Dill Pickle to read his early poems, did Kreymborg appear to have the solution as far as we were concerned.

Meanwhile, the change that was gradually coming over the most significant sector of American intellectual life, as well as the conditions under which the intellectual had to labor, was being vividly illustrated by the history of one publication, the *Dial*. Originally founded in Chicago by Francis F. Browne, it had functioned there as a dull and dignified fortnightly of the old school for nearly forty years, when, in 1919, it was transferred to New York to become for a brief period an organ of militant reform, with Robert Morss Lovett as editor and with Harold Stearns, George Donlin, and Clarence Britten as his assistants, while John Dewey, Thorstein Veblen, and others served as advisers. These advisers drew up what they called a "reconstruction program," a program which involved fighting for free speech, the right of assembly, the release of political prisoners and conscientious objectors, etc. But the editors speedily discovered that, even with the noblest of aims, they

could not go on publishing a magazine that was not popular and commercial in character without a "pork-barrel." In other words, it had to be underwritten; and by the end of November 1919 a pair of underwriters had been found in Schofield Thayer and J. S. Watson, both wealthy men.

With the advent of Thayer and Watson, the *Dial's* radical period came to an abrupt end and the young liberals who had been connected with it passed over to the *Freeman*, which itself, under Albert J. Nock's editorship, was to take on more and more of a literary and less and less of a socio-political tinge. From then on until its scarcely noted demise some ten years later, the *Dial* was to be enveloped in an "atmosphere of cloistered gloom," as Harry Hansen put it, making its monthly appearance in "a garb so colorless that if you put it on a library table, it would immediately disappear." It actually seemed to strive for a dull and highbrow aspect, and under the editorship first of Stewart Mitchell, then of Gilbert Seldes, and finally of Marianne Moore, it promptly became the organ of the advanced intelligentsia, with decided European leanings.

Among the Continental writers whom the *Dial* published were Anatole France, Oswald Spengler, Paul Valéry, Benedetto Croce, Ford Madox Hueffer (soon to be Ford Madox Ford), William Butler Yeats, Arthur Symons, and George Moore, with Thomas Mann, Maxim Gorky, Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, George Saintsbury, and others contributing correspondence. Anatole France's last words, the opening pages of *The Decline of the West*, and George Moore's *Imaginary Conversations* all appeared in these pages. The editors did not neglect American writers, and the magazine's annual \$2,000 prize went in turn to Sherwood Anderson, T. S. Eliot, Van Wyck Brooks (for his study of Mark Twain), Marianne Moore, E. E. Cummings, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Kenneth Burke. Carl Sandburg, Amy Lowell, Hart Crane, Conrad Aiken, John Dos Passos, Edmund Wilson, Evelyn Scott, Lewis Mumford, Paul Rosenfeld, and George

Santayana were among the other contributors. But its stress in literature as in plastic art—it reproduced the work of Picasso, Derain, Matisse, and other European modernists along with that of a few Americans—was palpably on the European product, the European model. And the *Dial*, it is to be remembered, was the most influential organ of the day among intellectuals.

In 1922, it printed Eliot's prize poem, *The Waste Land*, one which seemed to sum up all the ugliness of that world left by the war. The effect upon thoughtful young Americans was instantaneous and profound, especially after the poem was published in book form the following year; and the typist returning to her furnished room at tea time and Mrs. Porter washing her feet in soda water became symbols that, whether Eliot and his admirers realized it or not, meant far more than the recondite myth behind the work and all the scholarly epexegesis that the author might see fit to give us. For Mrs. Porter and the typist represented a desert that all could behold about them, while the poet's brilliant technical gifts elevated this hymn of death—of little daily deaths-in-life—into a masterpiece which was to influence and dominate a generation to come.

It is true that, as Malcolm Cowley points out in his *Exile's Return*, not all of those who admired *The Waste Land* most intensely for its form were prepared to accept its socially reactionary implications. "Here," says Cowley, "was a poem that agreed with all our recipes and prescriptions of what a great modern poem should be. . . . We were prepared to defend it against the attacks of the people who didn't understand what Eliot was trying to do—but we made private reservations. The poem had forced us into a false position, had brought our consciously adopted principles into conflict with our instincts. At heart—not intellectually, but in a purely emotional fashion—we didn't like it. We didn't agree with the idea that the poem set forth."

That idea in essence was a condemnation of the unaesthetic present, an implied glorification of the beauties of the past; and the general direction, as soon became apparent, was toward the bosom of the Church. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Eliot and *The Waste Land* had an influence, and a pronounced one, upon the expatriate movement, which had by this time set in—it was from their café chairs in Montparnasse or from some other nook in France that Cowley and his compatriots, the other *émigrés* of 1921, formulated their judgments. One wonders: if the migration had been deferred a year or two, or if the poem had appeared a little earlier, and they had analyzed it in a New York apartment or a Village tearoom, would the result have been any different? Probably not. As it was, *The Waste Land* if anything likely served to swell the ranks of the exiles; for were not they too, in reality, going back to the past?

The hegira had begun dramatically enough, not to say theatrically; but this should not lead us to overlook the very real anguish and the challenge that lay behind it. It had started with a symposium on *Civilization in the United States* by thirty intellectuals, with Harold Stearns as editor. At last they were getting down to bedrock, and what they found was not pay dirt. No sooner had he written his preface and delivered the manuscript to the publisher than Stearns caught a boat for France. This was the signal. More and more followed him by every Europe-bound steamer, in (as Cowley put it in *Exile's Return*) "a great migration eastward into new prairies of the mind."

What were the faults that these writers had to find with their country, as revealed in their symposium? Many and varied ones; but the sum of the indictment appeared to be the overwhelming material values enforced by a standardized and machine-made civilization, the lack of any spiritual depth, the falsity, the sentimentality, the hypocrisy, the repressions that go with such a civilization. There were numerous minor criti-

cisms, but they all came back to this. The conclusion was that life must somehow be spiritualized—again, no thought of altering the material base—and it seemed that this could be done only in Europe. Such was the view expressed by Stearns in the last article that he wrote before sailing, an article that was published shortly after in the *Freeman*.

As I write these lines, I think of Stearns as I knew him in Paris, wandering at night from bar to bar. He usually came in late, after he had written his "Peter Pickum" column on the Longchamps races for the Paris edition of the *Chicago Tribune*. Most often he would stand at the bar alone and drink, quiet, affable, not seeking company yet not upstage. Shunning as a rule the haunts of the Montparnasse crowd, he was seldom seen in the Dôme and only occasionally at the Select; he preferred the little American bars around the Quarter. It was always hard for me to make out whether he liked the company of writers or not. Certainly he never sought them out; on the other hand, he never went out of his way to avoid them, was never rude. He did not even avoid the subject of literature. You felt, however, that his heart was not in it, unless it was the literature of the past. One evening when the two of us were alone in a little out-of-the-way *bistro*, and had before us, in place of our accustomed *fines* or eight-franc Scotch, a bottle of really good Burgundy, I remember that he did talk, and brilliantly, of the subject in which I was most interested: Rabelais. Again, I have seen him at a *café* table, as the conversation showed signs of coming close to home—it might be with some college youth of the late 'twenties or the early 'thirties who had just come over and who, familiar with the Harold Stearns legend, was working up to the point where (so he fancied) he would be able to draw the Great Exile out of his shell—I have seen him on such an occasion turn to a little French prostitute and devote his attention exclusively to her. Yet in this, as in everything that he did, there was no

stress, no pointedness, no gesture designed to offend, although he could be caustic enough when he wished to be.

It was when the subject of horses came up that Stearns was unaffectedly interested, even animated. Horses and women, American women in particular. Perhaps it was his Kentucky background. Not that he was ever, to my knowledge, anything approaching a "ladies' man"; but in Jimmy's or the Dingo I used to like to watch him as, over his solitary drink, he studied the behavior of some girl or matron from the States engaged in losing her repressions. At such times a look of amazement would come over his face, the rather sad smile that he commonly wore would give way to an expression of amusement, and he would actually seem happy for a moment.

Once my wife and I were showing the Left Bank at night to a young woman from New York and Hollywood, a literary and motion picture agent. On this, her last night before catching the early morning boat train at the Saint-Lazare Station, she wanted to see all that there was to be seen. As I had put her in touch with an author whom she considered a lucrative prospect and in addition had introduced her to Luigi Pirandello, Jean Cocteau, and a few other celebrities that afternoon, she was not only feeling elated commercially but was in a mood for lion hunting.

We were sitting in the comparatively quiet café Flore when Stearns wandered in. Never too careful about his appearance, he was looking his seediest that evening, and to Florence (as we shall call her) he must have seemed the next thing to a tramp. I called him over, presented him to our guest, and he sat down with us. Florence, I could tell, was puzzled. She doubtless took him for a "character," a Maxwell Bodenheim of Montparnasse. It was not until Harold excused himself to go to the *cabinet* that she had a chance to ask us who—and what—he was.

"Harold Stearns! Oh, yes, I've heard of him. I've read about him." (This I doubted.) "But what does he *do*?"

"He covers the races for the *Chicago Tribune*."

"Bu-u-t . . . I thought you said he was an intellectual, a great intellectual. What—" At that moment Harold came back.

Florence proceeded to get high. She is the sort of person who can only be described as "bouncing"; I have seldom known anyone with more excess vitality. In New York or Hollywood this vitality is drained off into business channels, and in office hours she is shrewd, hard-headed, driving, though a good fellow underneath; but when she plays . . . She wanted to order champagne, but we would not let her. Instead, Harold must initiate her into the milky-green mysteries of a pernod. A pernod, to tell the truth, was about the only thing capable of coping with Florence, and Stearns appeared to take a delight in seeing what would happen; for once he was enjoying himself.

Well, the pernods worked, and within a short while Florence had made a best-seller out of Harold Stearns.

"You think I can't do it? You just leave it to little Florence. You write that book for me, that's all—"

I was watching Stearns. I had never seen him so relaxed, so amused; but beneath his amusement was an unconcealed wonderment.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he said in an aside. "I didn't know they made them like that in America."

This remark led me in turn to wonder: had he ever really seen his America before renouncing it? Had he seen the people in it? Was he beginning to feel something of this at times? He was not a happy man; but his unhappiness, his loneliness, was something that he chose to guard against all intruders.

In 1933, not long before I returned to America, Stearns finally agreed to write an article for my magazine, the *New Review*. I felt that, in view of his long literary silence, this was a triumph. But the depression was on by then and the maga-

zine, as little magazines have a way of doing, passed out of existence. I wish that it could have survived one more number, if only to have published him. At any rate, I had the feeling for the first time that Stearns *would* go back to America and that he would write again. I never saw him after he came back, but I read his nostalgia-laden book and it seemed to me that once again he had exiled himself, this time from an exile that had become his *patria*.

This, remember, was the intellectual who led the great migration of 1921. I do not believe that his case is as atypical as it may seem. It has its theoric aspects, but these were not deliberate. They were due to his determination to go all the way, and to his innate and excessive modesty. Nevertheless, the question still remains: why did Harold Stearns, who fled America to find a more spiritual existence and a nobler culture, become a Peter Pickum? Why were there so many Peter Pickums among the expatriates? Was Stein right about the Lost Generation? Why lost, in what manner and how far lost? It was perhaps the first and only time in history that the intellectual cream of a young generation had deliberately, of its own free choice, gone into exile. Exiled by whom? By what?

It is, I find, still hard for those who stayed at home to understand. To such, one can only quote those magnificent verses of Guillaume Apollinaire:

Be forbearing when you compare us
With those who were the perfection of order.
We who everywhere seek adventure,
We are not your enemies.
We would give you vast and strange domains
Where flowering mystery waits for him would pluck it.
There are new flames and colors never glimpsed
A myriad bodiless phantoms
On which we must confer reality.

We would explore beauty, enormous, silent land.
There is a season for the hunt and for the huntsman's return.
Have compassion for us who are always fighting on the frontiers
Of the boundless future,
Compassion for our errors, compassion for our sins.

Soyez indulgents . . . pitié pour nous. . . .

2. PRAIRIE FLOWER

So far as my own "expatriation" is concerned, I cannot be sure just when or where it all started. I think, however, that it was the prairies, that endless waving sea of green in summer, in other seasons an expanse of brown stubble or of snow. But flat, always flat! Anyone who has not been born and reared in the heart of the prairies will never be able to appreciate what this means. He will never be able to realize how intensely a boy can long for the sight of a mountain or for a glimpse of lake, sea, or river, something more than the dirty little half-dried-up creek that ran through the scant woods on the outskirts of the central Illinois village where I was born and where I lived until my late teens. My geography was my only refuge from the flat. I reveled in its pictures of mountains and dreamed of the Alps—for somehow it was always the Alps, never the Rockies, that the word mountain evoked for me. And I shall not forget the first mountain that I *did* behold, years later, when upon awakening from a night's sleep I glanced out the window of a railway compartment, and saw close at hand, up against the car window almost—the Swiss Alps!

It was not only seas and mountains that I longed for. My geography also had pictures of cathedrals, high-perched castles in Scotland or on the Rhine, peasants in colorful dress, famous art galleries. I would go down to that stunted growth of wood and try to imagine myself in a cathedral: "The woods were God's first temples." But the woods did not give me

what I wanted. My ear, even, was hungry for the sound of a language, any language, other than the one I heard about me; and from the age of nine I began developing an interest in foreign tongues. An old German shoemaker taught me a few words of his Bavarian speech. He was flattered that I should wish to learn them; but I was a child, after all, and he did not take the matter seriously. It was a great day when, in the home of one of the village ladies who had been to boarding school, I came upon a French reader. At twelve I was studying Latin and by the next year was keeping a jealously guarded diary in the idiom of Julius Caesar. The year after, it was Xenophon and parasangs; for my Latin teacher had offered to give me private lessons in Greek.

Then came the summer when, sensing it to be a forbidden book, I sneaked up into the hayloft with a copy of Urquhart's Rabelais which a young and heretical high school instructor who boarded in our home had left behind him. There was a great deal in it that I did not understand, but I think I can truthfully say that it was not the "obscenity" that appealed to me; it was, rather, that here was yet another world far removed from the flat and from that waving sea of green. Removed in time as well as in space. However little I may have grasped of Rabelais at that age, it was a turning point for me.

My boyhood longing for the exotic sometimes took curious forms. At the age of fifteen, I shocked my parents by informing them that I would never think of marrying an American girl, or one of the white race; I was going to have a Japanese wife—I used to dream of her slit almond eyes. And I had never heard of Lafcadio Hearn! I ask myself if I was as different from other lads as it would seem, upon looking back, that I must have been. Was there something in my personal heredity or environment that accounted for it, or were such reactions, possibly, more common than one might think? All I knew was that I wanted to get away.

If I mention these things here, it is not that I look upon

them as important in themselves, but because I do regard them as symptomatic of a certain revolt that was growing in the minds of the young who had learned to use their minds, against the stuffiness of provincial ideas and provincial mores for which the flatness of the landscape in my case served merely as a symbol. It was an instinctive, unconscious or half-conscious rebellion against a smug Americanism which saw America as the best of all conceivable lands, with nothing to learn from any other—Walt Whitman's evangel vulgarized into an oppressive platitude.

When I came to college, I encountered fresh heresies. It all seems tame enough to me now, but it was very radical then. The University of Chicago was an institution which, founded by John D. Rockefeller under Baptist auspices, was attracting considerable attention by the fact that certain professors in its Divinity School were questioning the literalness of Biblical inspiration and of miracles and were introducing social elements into their religious teachings. Was John D. harboring a nest of atheistic vipers? You would have thought so from the fuss that was occasionally raised in the more sensational press. We undergraduates were rather pleased with this and with the spirit of free and untrammeled inquiry that seemed to be in the air. We were also hearing of new and unorthodox writers from overseas, prominent among them Bernard Shaw; I have a vivid recollection of a small group of men that met with the late Percy Holmes Boynton, high up in Mitchell Tower, to smoke cigarettes and read *The Devil's Disciple*, one occupation being about as daring as the other.

Some of us came to hear of Karl Marx, and we formed a little circle, led by a Russian student, to study *Das Kapital* in the original. (This, of course, was in the time of the Czars.) An instructor in the economics department became a Marxist, lost his position on the faculty, and ran for alderman on the Socialist ticket. The treatment accorded him came as something of a shock, and we began to see that there was a differ-

ence between religious and social radicalism. The Hyde Park branch of the Socialist Party was in the habit of holding its meetings in the Sixty-third Street shop of Barney Berlin, a picturesque German cigar-maker and Marxist of the old school, and we would go there once in a while to listen to the discussions, which were academic in the extreme: "Expropriate the expropriators"—but should the expropriators be compensated? Should Marxists be vegetarians, and ought women to wear bird-feathers on their hats? We also went to hear Emma Goldman when she came to town. Garment workers in the Loop were striking, and mounted police were riding them down on the sidewalks—women strikers, at that. There was a streetcar strike. Was it right for college men to serve as strikebreakers, the college Y.M.C.A. as a strike-breaking agency? Things were being brought home to us. Dean Robert Morss Lovett was stalking about the Quadrangle with very English clothes and accent, and from his lips we heard the first precepts of the new liberalism.

Upon leaving college and a campus correspondent's job to become a full-time reporter, I somehow, without knowing just how it happened, found myself in the thick of the "Chicago Renaissance," sharing a room with Danny Reed of Maurice Browne's Little Theater in that home of impecunious actors and newspapermen with literary inclinations, the Grant Park Hotel, now long extinct. From the window of our three-dollar-a-week room we could look down into the dining room of the Blackstone Hotel directly across the way. We once watched John D. Rockefeller having a frugal breakfast there. It was in our place that some of the young literati used to gather to listen to Danny's dramatic rendition of the Spoon River epitaphs, *Chicago Poems*, and Vachel Lindsay's chants; after which, a copy of one of these works or of one of Anderson's latest novels under our arms, we would go over to the Little Theater, high up in the Fine Arts Building, and there, likely as not, we would encounter, stepping out of the elevator,

Margaret Anderson, Jane Heap, or others of the *Little Review* crowd with a copy of the latest public-taste-defying issue in their hands.

Ever since the early years of the century, Chicago had been producing a good part, more than its share, of the nation's significant, truly modern, socially conscious literature, the literature that came to supplant that of the Gilded Age and the Genteel Tradition, which, with William Dean Howells as its leading representative, had lingered on until 1912 or thereabouts. This was to lead H. L. Mencken to confer upon the "hog-butcher to the world" the title of "literary capital of the United States," after Philadelphia, Boston, New York had in turn enjoyed that honor.

Various causes have been assigned for this prominence, one of them being that Chicago was a natural port of call for young writers all over the Midwest and the West on their way to Manhattan. It was here, too, in the shadow of the stockyards and the wheat pit, that the life of a growingly prosperous America was to be viewed in its crudest, most unlovely aspects. In the 1890's, Chicago writers and publishers had attempted a hyperaesthetic escape by importing the *fin de siècle* Yellow Book decadence that was so prevalent in the Europe and especially the England of that day; and we find the firm of Stone and Kimball bringing out the *Chapbook* and such authors and artists as Maeterlinck, Beardsley, and Henry Blake Fuller. Even then, however, the stockyards were making themselves felt; and Fuller, that exile too soon returned, after writing *The Chevalier of Pensieri Vani* and *The Chate-laine of La Trinité*, proceeded to put his exquisite prose at the service of a realism so subtly nuanced that the keen observation and the irony go all but unperceived; yet in *The Cliff-Dwellers*, *With the Procession*, and *On the Stairs*, one is conscious always of the neighboring presence and the odor of the South Side cattle-pens.

Where Fuller, a stylist in the wilderness, had toyed daintily with the indigenous theme, preserving all the while an air of detachment, the muckrakers, who were soon to come and who were to put Chicago on the literary map, were concerned rather with the moral and social aspect of the scene. Norris, Sinclair, Dreiser, Herrick—*The Pit* and *The Octopus*, *Sister Carrie*, *Waste*—it was writers and works such as these who turned the eyes of all America toward the city by the lake. (Herrick's *Waste*, it may be noted, has a despairing hero who becomes an "exile" in Mexico and who sees even the muckrakers and the liberal movement as no more than "the revolt of the little hogs against the big hogs.") It was a brilliant flowering; and then, all of a sudden, the impulse appeared to subside, many of the writers moved on, and for the better part of a decade the dullness was relieved only by the urbane criticism first of Fuller and then of Francis Hackett in the literary pages of the *Chicago Evening Post*.

It was about 1912 that things began to happen. In that year Harriet Monroe, who had composed and read a commemorative ode for the opening of the Chicago World's Fair, and who for some twenty years had been an elocution teacher, took it into her head to found a magazine for poets. The result was *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, first of its kind in America and parent of a numerous and sometimes dreadful progeny. *Poetry* might have proved none too exciting a venture, it might have turned out to be quite as innocuous as many other periodicals of this sort, had it not been for the Imagists, British and American, and Carl Sandburg, and Edgar Lee Masters, and Vachel Lindsay, and a general poetry renascence that for some inscrutable reason appeared to be in the making.

In any event, over in England, Pound, Eliot, Aldington, Flint, H.D., and other poets, finding the British publishers cold to their productions, suddenly discovered this little publication in the heart of the American prairies and submitted their work to it. I am inclined to think, from later conversa-

tions with Aldington and others, that they were rather amused by it all. Amy Lowell, Robert Frost, Edwin Arlington Robinson, John Gould Fletcher, Wallace Stevens, Louis Untermeyer, Witter Bynner, and numerous other American poets were now appearing in *Poetry's* pages, to make this the most advanced organ of its kind anywhere in the world at the time, the home of Imagism, free verse, and all the modern trends.

There were numerous signs of a coming spring. Sandburg, then editing the *Day Book*, a small sheet devoted to news that the other papers refused to print, was soon to publish his first volume; Masters was moving up to Chicago from the neighborhood of St. Louis and *Reedy's Mirror*; Lindsay, down in Springfield, was practically commuting from the state capital to the corn belt metropolis; Sherwood Anderson, working as manager of an Ohio paint factory, was soon to give up his job and devote himself to literature; Ben Hecht, fresh out of high school in Racine, Wisconsin, and with ambitions to become a violinist in the Thomas Orchestra, was a reporter on the *Chicago Daily News*.

Such the Chicago that I found. The most fascinating phenomenon of all to me was the *Little Review*. It was founded in 1914 by Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap—the latter was the power behind the throne. This "little" magazine subsequently moved on, to New York and thence to Europe, but it was in Chicago that its real history was made. Just what the background of the editors was, nobody seemed to know—or care. All they knew was that Miss Anderson was very beautiful and played the piano rather charmingly and that Miss Heap was intellectually dynamic. It was said that they came from Missouri or somewhere west of the Mississippi. Whatever their antecedents, they fell under the influence of Emma Goldman, became "aristocratic anarchists," and determined to launch a review embodying in the realm of art their newfound creed. Among the authors they published were Pound,

Joyce, William Carlos Williams, Aldous Huxley, Marianne Moore, Ernest Hemingway, A. R. Orage, Maxwell Bodenheim, Mark Turbyfill, Emanuel Carnevali, and many others. It was in the pages of the *Little Review* that the first installments of *Ulysses* were printed—and suppressed by the censor. Ezra Pound edited a French poetry number, in French. And on one famous occasion the magazine came out with perfectly blank pages, the reason given being that the editors had found nothing worth putting into type; they promised that they would continue the practice until some real literature was produced.

The high point of the renaissance was probably reached around 1916, and Hecht's *Erik Dorn*, published in 1921, represented just about its last flare. From the early 'twenties on there began a decline, although the natives stubbornly refused to recognize the fact and it took the country some little while to discover it. One thing that may be noted, however, is the launching in Chicago of the "young" magazine movement—the "young," in this case, as distinguished from the "little" magazine.

From Detroit, Michigan, in 1922, came a most erratic young man by the name of Harold Auer, of whom it was known only that he bore a letter of introduction from Frank Harris and that he wished to start a literary review. He persuaded me to take the job of editor, and within a month *Youth* was on the stands, containing contributions not only from Chicago but from the East as well; for I found that Easterners were eager to appear in a Midwestern periodical. On the whole, the magazine ran to young authors: Carnevali, Turbyfill, Oscar Williams, among the poets, while Hecht and a few other names lent it weight. As far as I am aware, *Youth* marked the beginning of the young magazine craze that swept the country in the 1920's as still another protest against a commercialized culture that afforded a beginning writer no chance to experiment and thereby learn his trade and expand his art.

It was natural that the "young" and "little" magazine movements became closely associated with that of the expatriates, the small reviews in America constituting a kind of Left Bank for stay-at-home exiles. Today, these publications without any impressive financial underpinning are an established and, on the whole, a useful feature of the literary landscape. Even those authors who later graduate into the "slicks" write the better for such an apprenticeship, and the experimentings of the young have not been without their effect upon the commercial media. At times, hard-boiled professionals have appropriated—and bastardized—the technique of the aesthetes; while in one or two instances, such as that of Whit Burnett's *Story* magazine, the latter have made their art pay dividends.

Youth upon its appearance created a furor in Chicago, and to a certain extent in New York as well. In its home city a group of newspapermen put out a parody entitled *Puberty*, with the result that the issues of both publications were at once exhausted and became collector's items. After a few sporadic numbers it died from lack of funds and its place was taken by *Prairie*. This time the moving spirit was Samuel Pessin of Milwaukee, later to be known as Lawrence Drake, the novelist. Pessin had been publishing the *Milwaukee Arts Magazine*, rather closely associated with the Milwaukee Players. Lured by the intellectual fireworks and din of Chicago, Pessin, accompanied by R. Ellsworth Larsson and others, must bring his magazine there and rechristen it with a name that held a broader significance, even though one with which columnists might readily amuse themselves:

I'm a little prairie flower,
Growing wilder every hour . . .

Once more I found myself an editor, and once again it was not for long.

Some years later I was to meet Pessin (Drake) at the Dôme

and we were to indulge in the usual not highly profitable post-mortems. I was to bend over Emanuel Carnevali as he lay slowly dying of encephalitis in a hospital in Bologna, Italy. On the fringes of Montparnasse, I was to catch sight occasionally of that extremely retiring pair, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap. There appear to be some who are always moving on and on, to a Rive Gauche that never fulfills their dream.

I have said that it was around 1921 that the last flare or spurt of the prairie renaissance occurred. This is not quite true; the date probably should be 1923-1924, a period marked by the opening of the Covici-McGee bookshop in West Washington Street, which soon became a publishing venture and the headquarters of Hecht, Bodenheim, and the younger intelligentsia. Under the Covici-McGee imprint there appeared such works as Hecht's *1001 Afternoons in Chicago* and *Fantazius Mallare*, Bodenheim's *Blackguard*, etc. And when the bookshop after a year or two closed its doors, Covici started a publishing house of his own. Meanwhile Hecht had founded the Dadaistic-tending *Chicago Literary Times*, with Bodenheim as his associate and with two or three of us as regular contributors. This was without a doubt the most extraordinary "literary" magazine ever published in America, one of the rules being that no headline must have anything whatsoever to do with the article that followed. It was essentially Hecht's plaything, and he kept it going until he grew tired of it, then cut it short.

As a matter of fact, the renaissance had become a one-man affair, centering about Hecht. It was Hecht who dominated the "*Daily News* School," the gathering-place of which was Schlogl's Restaurant, with the dignified, scholarly Hansen, then literary critic on the *News*, as master of ceremonies. Here Ben would hold forth to a miscellaneous audience of newspaper and advertising men, doctors (Morris Fishbein among

them) and lawyers, would-be writers, and those who merely came to worship. There was good conversation, and it helped to preserve the illusion that Chicago was still the "capital" it once had been; but it did not require much inspection to discover that this was far from being the case. It is true that there were all kinds of literary organizations, such as were—and are—to be found in the provincial cities of America: the Book-fellows; the Friends of American Writers; the Poetry Lovers of America; the Book and Play Club; the Greater English Club; the Society of Midland Authors; but most of these were militantly futile.

I myself at this time was writing art and literary criticism for the *Chicago Evening Post* and so had a fairly good opportunity for close-up observation. Editing the paper's *Magazine of the Art World*, published every Tuesday, was C. J. Bulliet, another of those mysterious strangers who were always descending upon us, out of the nowhere or the hinterland, to start a review, open a bookshop, or launch a publishing enterprise. I sometimes pictured them as riding in on white chargers; for they came to do battle, and a lively fray almost invariably attended their coming. Bulliet was the most impassioned lover of modern painting that I have ever known, and for a year or two I had the time of my life with him, assaulting the battlements of the local academicians as represented by the Art Institute and defending the cause of the No Jury painters (corresponding to the New York Independents). It was a great victory the day we forced the Institute to bring its Cézannes up out of the basement and put them on exhibition!

On the literary page, I found Llewellyn Jones a little more conservative, or at least more restrained, but he allowed me the utmost freedom of expression, and it was this that was to get me into trouble and hasten my flight to Paris. In Chicago, I soon discovered, certain things were sacrosanct, not subject to criticism; they had become institutions and were to be ac-

cepted unquestioningly as such. One of these was Miss Monroe's *Poetry*. Another was the Bookfellows. Another, the Society of Midland Authors. Even Schlogl's, though I did not realize it, had achieved this dignity. There were, likewise, certain ideas that were unchallengeable. One was that Chicago was and would continue to be the literary capital. It all seemed unbearably stuffy to me; it was getting on my nerves.

Take *Poetry*, for example. That Miss Monroe had performed a valiant and invaluable service for letters, no one could deny; but, living now on its past, as I saw it, the magazine had come to take on a pontifical air as the make-or-break arbiter of poetic destinies in America. And I happened to know a little too much about how some of those destinies were fashioned, just how it was that one got into the pages of *Poetry*. In the case of young poets with a properly pathetic, orphaned air, they might camp on the editor's doorstep—she had found Oscar Williams sitting there one morning. In the case of others—

I recall a dinner in Harriet's honor given at the Arts Club of Chicago, with all the Gold Coast sponsors of *Poetry* present and with Robert Frost as principal speaker. I can still see Frost, his arm about Miss Monroe, and can hear the somewhat fulsome praise he bestowed upon her. When I wrote Pound of this, it called forth one of his epistolary explosions: "And to think that it took me eight years to get Harriet to publish Frost! The same with Eliot. . . ." I have this letter in my files; and I have another one that begins: "Harriet bitched me!" I happened to know, also, the influence those sponsors exerted. There was the time when, on complaint of one of them, a poem by Emanuel Carnevali was thrown out of the magazine because it contained the word syphilis and the author refused to have it deleted. Perhaps these things had best not have been told; but I was a brash young journalist, and I did tell some, though by no means all. It did not make me popular.

The local picture as a whole was not exhilarating as far as intellectual stimulation was concerned; but this would not have been so bad if Chicagoans had been willing to recognize the fact. On the Near North Side, radiating from Jack Jones and the Dill Pickle Club, was a diminutive, forlorn imitation of Greenwich Village, with tearooms where one sat and drank from the bathtub gin that he carried on his hip and talked of Marx and Freud and modern art. Opposite the Newberry Library was "Bughouse Square," which is the Union Square or Hyde Park of Chicago, where one might listen to Ben Reitman, reformed anarchist, as he preached from a soapbox a Sunday school version of Christianity. Near by was the Radical Book Shop; and at Eight West Walton Place was the Jacob Loeb home, the one real oasis, where one might encounter anyone from Big Bill Haywood and his followers to Frederick Starr, the anthropologist, or Serge Prokofieff—there was one evening when Bill sat listening as Prokofieff played the piano. But the Loeb house has a saga of its own which cannot be related here. Jacob, educated at a German university, used to say to me: "Why don't you get out and go to Europe, if only for your *Wanderjahre*?" And someone else would add: "If I were you, I'd get a boat and row over."

Outside of the Loebs and the studios of a few good modern painters such as Salcia Bahnc, Rudolph Weisenborn, Ramon Shiva, and Emil Armin, there was not much in the way of escape. One thing that did afford a diversion was the Twentieth Century Limited. Those were the pre-air-travel days, and it was the Century that brought us the visiting or transient notables. During the years immediately following the war there was a great influx of British men of letters who had come to lecture to American audiences and reap a lyceum harvest. They came on the Century. So did Hollywood: Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, Pola Negri, Gloria Swanson, and all the rest. It was my job to meet the train and interview the

celebrities, an assignment on which I frequently met Ben Hecht or John Gunther from the *News*.

I cannot say that the experience was either thrilling or enlightening. There was Chesterton. I sat with him on a bench in the Blackstone Hotel lobby and did my best to get him to talk of his approach to Catholicism; but the only subject that interested him as he sat there with his little fat hands on his fat stomach was the inferior quality of American home brew as compared with English ale. There was Lord Dunsany at the Congress Hotel, with a grand opera singer in the next room running her arias. Tall, willowy, a pale hand to his pale forehead, the author of *Gods of the Mountain* could only lie back in his chair and groan as Lady Dunsany did her best to comfort him. There was Yeats, wearing a flowing tie such as I had not seen for years, save on Ben Reitman, and dancing pumps with rosettes. (An Irish journalist later explained: "They think they have to do that for the American trade.") I was so fascinated by his attire that I am afraid I did not get a great deal from the interview beyond the impression that Mr. Yeats did not approve of what he found in the United States. There was Aldous Huxley, who, stretching out his long, Lytton-Strachey-like legs, spoke cautiously of a "mechanical and standardized civilization." There was Conan Doyle, who disdainfully declined to discuss detective stories but insisted on telling me how he had rid a haunted house of a ghost. There was Ford Madox Ford, who, when I later met him at a party, gravely reproached me for having referred to his hair as gray: "It isn't gray; it's silvery." I looked at him, but he was not laughing.

Possibly this should have dampened somewhat my enthusiasm for things European; but I had already heard of Dada, the "revolt of the sons," and the "war of generations"; and I was reading fervently, between editions at my local-room desk, such postwar writers as Cocteau, Delteil, Morand, Giraudoux, and MacOrlan. I had amassed a fair-sized library of

les jeunes when, in process of moving, I had the entire crate of them stolen from me. This was the last straw!

And then, one day, I had a letter from H. L. Mencken, who apparently had been reading my lamentations in the *Evening Post*. "Why don't you do an article for the *Mercury*, showing up those phonies out there?" he wrote. In those days it was "Mencken giveth and Mencken taketh away." Having crowned Chicago as the literary capital in the first place, he had decided that it was now time to dethrone it, and, in accordance with the *Mercury's* policy, he preferred a local hatchet-man for the job. I was elected and I accepted. An interesting correspondence followed in which Henry L. became very specific, and as the proofs came through, I found that he had thought of still more victims whom he wished me to add to the list. There were certain scalps that he wanted, chiefly those of the *Daily News-Schlogl* crowd. He was especially bitter toward the late Keith Preston, then columnist on the *News*, who it seemed had been guilty of *lèse-majesté*.

When my article finally appeared in the August 1926 *Mercury*, it bore the startling caption: "Chicago: An Obituary." The effect was instantaneous and bordered on riot. I was assailed by columnists and literary organizations all over town. A mass meeting was held at which I was all but lynched in effigy. I was read out of the Press Club for my remarks about that institution and my symbolic picture of Opie Reed dozing in one of the club chairs. Even Carl Sandburg took a hand by coming to the defense of Miss Monroe and *Poetry*. That was natural and laudable enough; but what added to my disillusionment was the list of local big ducks and literary nobodies whom Carl upbraided me for not mentioning. It revealed to me just how provincial Chicago really was. When I sent Mencken the clippings, he wrote back: "This is very amusing stuff. You gave all the fakes a salubrious and much needed shaking-up." There were letters, too, from Chicago writers

of a former day. "It is a mighty good article," Wilbur D. Nesbitt assured me. "How good is shown by the ululations of those over whom your chariot wheels were driven. Old Henry Mencken himself never worked a spectroscope to better effect."

In short, it looked as if I had been started on a career as a "debunker," a role which, soberly, I did not fancy.

It was about this time that Henry Blake Fuller came walking into the editorial room of the *Evening Post* one afternoon. He was an old man now, with white hair.

"I have been following you," he said, "and I've come to offer you some unasked-for advice. I think I know what is troubling you, and my advice is: Go to Paris, young man, go to Paris. You may have to come back as I did, but at least . . ."

As I looked at that white hair, I thought of *The Cliff-Dwellers, With the Procession*, all the restrained and delicate irony of years, and then the years of complete silence. Maybe I ought to get that boat and "row over."

In the meantime, I had begun publishing a few translations, in the *Double-Dealer* of New Orleans and other little magazines and in the art and literary pages of the *Post*: selections from Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Huysmans, and the young French writers of the *après-guerre*, the art criticism of André Salmon, etc. This, some while before, had attracted the attention of Pascal Covici, who had commissioned me to translate for him from the Italian the works of Aretino. The Aretino was followed by Huysmans' *Down Stream* (A-vau l'eau) and a number of other volumes. It was Covici who induced me to give up my newspaper job and devote myself entirely to translating for his new publishing house. I had put him in touch with Pound and Aldington and he had taken over the publication of the *Exile*; but his real passion was for the great classics of world literature. When I chanced to remark to him casually that I had been working for years on a modern version of

Rabelais and had finished a rough first draft—I showed him the “Remarks of the Drunkards” chapter—but needed to spend some time in France for study and research, he was delighted.

“Go home,” he said, “tell your wife to pack up the baby and a few other things, and start looking up boat schedules.”

“But how—?”

“Never mind how. I’ll see that you don’t starve.”

That was the beginning of our wanderings. And we did not starve. With an eight-months-old son and a spirit lamp for preparing the baby’s formula and, often, our own meals as well, we were to go from country to country, nine of them in all, living in cheap *pensions* and traveling third class. We carried innumerable pieces of luggage, most of them filled with diapers, which were always being lost in railway stations. We were wholly dependent upon my earnings, for I have never in my life been a remittance man. At times, when an editor or publisher’s check miscarried, we would find ourselves alarmingly low in funds and faced with the bleak prospect of having to throw ourselves on the nearest American consul; but something, mercifully, always happened at the last minute to make this unnecessary. There was one time in Geneva when we were down to our last Swiss franc. The baby was upstairs in the *pension*, sleeping peacefully. My wife and I looked at each other. “Let’s go across to the café and get a cup of coffee. We can’t tip the *garçon*, but he knows us. If the check’s not here by tomorrow morning, we’ll go to the consulate.” It came in the morning’s mail. Our landlord smiled as he handed it to us. He had an instinct for such things.

But it was Paris that was our home. It was to Paris that, sooner or later, we never failed to return.

Within a month after Covici had made his proposition, we were aboard the aged and, I suspect, leaky hulk, the *Rocham-*

beau. It was a slow boat—nine days—and the third-class-tourist was crowded with Paris-bound voyagers, including the usual quota of college youth and school teachers; but I discovered that a surprising number were going to France with the idea of remaining there: the expatriate movement of the early 'twenties had by no means spent itself as yet.

On the *Rochambeau*, I made the acquaintance of two Negro artists to whom Mencken had given me a note of introduction: Taylor Gordon, the singer, and J. Rosamond Johnson, the composer. The jazz craze was on in Europe, blues and spirituals were popular, and Negro musicians were in demand—Josephine Baker, we were soon to find, was perhaps the most talked-of woman in Paris. Gordon and Johnson had splendid voices and would sing for us in the third-class salon but not for the first-class passengers: if they were to be barred by their color from traveling first class, they would not go there as entertainers.

On our last night at sea, just before coming into Le Havre early in the morning, Gordon and I and those members of the crew who were off duty gathered on deck around a small tub of *vin rouge* which the sailors had produced from somewhere; and without being asked, Taylor began singing. I can hear his voice rolling out over the waves, can see the look on the faces of those French seamen as they listened to "Water Boy" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." Then they gave us their own songs, of Normandy and Brittany and Provence. It was daylight already and we were putting into port as I stumbled down to the cabin to rescue the baby, who had fallen to the floor and was slumbering tranquilly there, and to wake my wife. I somehow always remember this as my introduction to France.

II

Tears in the Tuileries

BY THE time the boat train reached the gare Saint-Lazare it was well on in the day. A friend had directed us to the Hôtel Raspail, opposite the café du Dôme, in the very center of Montparnasse life. Toward evening, having made arrangements with the *garçon's* wife to look in now and then on our ever-sound-sleeping son, we went out for our first Parisian stroll, an indescribable experience for anyone. Wandering down to the Seine, we crossed the pont du Carrousel and found ourselves in the garden of the Kings of France. The Tuileries with a moon above. We stood there for a moment without saying a word, and then Riva burst into tears. Now, a woman's tears to me are as often as not a thing of mystery, but for once I understood. I felt that way myself.

"But, dear," I could only stammer foolishly, "what are you crying about? We're in Paris, dear!"

"I know," was her reply. "That's why I'm crying."

A sentimental beginning? Paris has that effect on one. Those tears were the expression not merely of the fulfilled longing of two Midwesterners to escape from the prairie flatness, the stockyards atmosphere (my wife was born in Englewood), and the provincial smugness of American life as a whole; they were an instinctive reaction to the physical beauty and ultimately unanalyzable psychic charm of a city which for centuries has been the refuge and the home of exiles, of lost souls and, yes, of lost generations as well. This it is that makes it so hard to write of Paris without being sentimental. For more than a century, English and American authors, some first-rate ones among them, have been trying to put the thing

into words and none have been able to avoid a touch of sentimentality. Not even George Jean Nathan: "Paris of a thousand memories . . . little Ninon laughing and Fleurette sighing, and Hélène (just passed nineteen) weeping because life is so short and death so long." We might not expect this of Nathan; but that is what Paris does to you.

I was to be conscious of this feeling many times in the seven or eight years that were to come. More than once, walking in deep dejection along those tortuous little thoroughfares of the Left Bank, down by the Seine, streets the very names of which spelled history, I would suddenly shake myself together with the thought: "Well, at least I'm in Paris!" And my dejection would disappear or diminish rapidly. For the paradox is, here one may walk in rain and misery and still be comforted if not happy; and the reason, I think, is that one senses all the suffering that has gone before in this true Heartbreak House of the nations. The very cobblestones are soaked in it. "Only in Paris does one live," wrote Marie Bashkirtsev. She might have added: only in Paris does one suffer—in this especial way; only there does one get the full, deep, rich flavor of pain. At such times I would humbly think of all the great literary-political exiles from Dante to Unamuno.

But aside from this historic sense of suffering, Paris has a beauty that in itself is close to tears; and we were fortunate in our initiation: the Tuileries by moonlight, Paris at its loveliest.

There are, of course, innumerable other aspects: the famed Paris in spring, the broad boulevards and the trees; Paris in the rain, Paris between showers—above all, Paris in the early hours of the morning, an awakening Paris, the honk of Parisian taxis which only Gershwin has captured, the rumble of carts and hoofs over the cobbles, the imperialism of small shopkeepers annexing the sidewalk for their displays, the little tobacco shops where one may purchase a single cigarette, the *bistros*, the chauffeurs and *ouvriers* stopping in for a morning drink on their way to work, the flower vendors, the kiosks

with the world news flaming at one in headlines, the rapidly filling cafés and café terraces, the ubiquitous *pissoirs*.

It may all be trite enough to anyone who has lived in Paris for any length of time, but to the newcomer from America it is nothing less than another world. And when one has been away long enough, all these things take on in memory a nostalgic significance which would be hard to put into words but which is evoked by any good and honest set of photographs of Parisian street scenes—such pictures, for example, as those made by that old French photographer, Eugène Atget, whom Berenice Abbott discovered. Looking at these pictures, a former resident of Paris, a former “exile,” feels an almost irresistible desire to drop everything and go back at once, as soon as possible. It is very difficult to explain to those who have not been there; they are likely to think that you are indulging in a bit of *chichi*, as the Parisians would say.

All of which is another way of saying that Paris *does* get you. What my wife and I were experiencing in the moonlit Tuileries that first night was the beginning of a deep ingrowing love for a city and a land that were not ours, a love which every true “expatriate” felt and which came to be inextricably and more or less inarticulately intertwined with the reasons that he gave himself or others for leaving America or for staying on in France.

This factor must be taken into account in considering the expatriate complex of the 1920's. For were not all these things symbols, even though superficial ones, of the basic motives that had led to his flight from a “mechanized,” “standardized,” “machine-made,” civilization back in the States? Were they not, when one looked deeper, symbols of that retreat to the past proclaimed by Stearns in his farewell article in the *Freeman* and poetically foreshadowed in Eliot's *The Waste Land*? A flight, a retreat from too arduous a struggle: that of wresting out of elements so unaesthetic a new beauty, a new culture and civilization. At the time, however, we did not

think of all this; such wisdom as we have attained lies in retrospect.

We liked the French people and their way of life, even though we might grumble occasionally at their *petit-bourgeois* graspingness and other faults. We got along with them better than the tourists did, if only for the reason that we stayed longer and had a chance to become acquainted. Too many of the American artist colony—the fault of such colonies everywhere—tended to associate more or less exclusively with other Americans or with the British, and knew little more about the French, or France, or, for that matter, Paris, than if they had remained at home in Greenwich Village or one of its numerous counterparts. On the other hand, those who spoke French or learned to speak it and who lived among the people of the country came to discover many things.

There were, it is true, certain difficulties, certain barriers to be overcome. Chief among these was the question of money. The French, we found, had a conception of America as the "*pays d'or*," the land of gold. This was not surprising, considering the palatial Hollywood interiors in the imported American films of that period; the movies had a great influence, and in small villages far from the metropolis young French lads were to be seen imitating the slicked-back hair and flaring-bottomed trousers of Rudolph Valentino, while the girls did their best to imitate the mannerisms of Gloria Swanson. It followed as a natural corollary that we writers and painters, being Americans so far from home and with nothing to do but paint or write, must be wealthy; and seeing that we had come there to live off the devalued franc, why should not the citizens of the country get the most out of us that was to be had?

For our part we were unbelievably callous—I shudder to think of it now. We did not realize, we made no effort to realize, how hard life was for the average Frenchman with the

postwar franc at two to four cents, twenty-five to the dollar most of the time that I was there. We accordingly were inclined to regard as a national characteristic a "graspingness" (as it seemed to us) that in reality had its roots in social conditions centuries old and had been aggravated by the economic collapse following the war.

The subject of the war, incidentally, and France's non-payment of her war debts, could be a touchy and even a dangerous one; and in some of the drinking places around the place de l'Opéra an intoxicated American in an altercation with a French bartender had but to demand "Who won the war?" or "Why don't you pay your debts?" in order to start a most interesting free-for-all.

When we did come to know each other, in regions unspoiled by the tourist and under conditions quite different from those that marked his intercourse with the inhabitants, we learned that the French were an altogether likable folk who could teach us much, while they, discovering that we were not Hollywood millionaires but struggling artists, would readily look upon us as human beings. It was then that we began to acquire something more than a surface understanding of Gallic attitudes and to study them more deeply in comparison with and in contrast to those to which we had been accustomed.

One of the things that impressed us most, rebels as we were against a Puritan-Protestant "Comstockery," against the prevalent falsity and hypocrisy of sexual relations, including the husband and wife relation, in the States, was what at first appeared to be a certain amoral attitude on the part of our hosts; but if we looked closely, we saw that this also was to be explained by economic factors—the girl of a poor family turned prostitute—or by age-old social custom such as the family-arranged marriage of convenience; whence the institution, for an institution it was, of lover and mistress. The fact is that most of us did not inquire so closely as this but took

things as we found them, as a welcome relief from the America that the Menckens and Lewises were even then endeavoring to laugh to death. Basically, perhaps, it all went back to the difference between a very old Catholic civilization and a much younger Protestant one.

In any event, we were charmed by the individualism of the French (failing to see that life for them was quite as standardized in its way as it was with us) and by their respect for personal privacy, their walled gardens in place of the American front porch and rocking chair, their indifference as to who might or who might not commit fornication or adultery, and the perfect nonchalance with which the *patron* of a hotel would register a couple as Monsieur and Mademoiselle So-and-So.

All this for us was summed up by Paris, the ancient city that had risen out of the mud banks of the Seine, whose history goes back to that day in the first century B.C. when Julius Caesar convoked at Lutetia, as Paris then was called, an assembly of the Gallic tribe known as the Parisii, inhabiting the present Île de la Cité. How many vicissitudes and transformations it had undergone since then! Clovis and the Franks in the fifth and sixth centuries; Charlemagne some two hundred and fifty years later; Hugh Capet, first King of France, in the tenth century; in the fifteenth century, pestilence, famine, ravening wolves in the streets; Paris and the barricades of '48 and '71; for a thousand years the largest city in the world and still the most beautiful. I used to wonder if the "exiled" artists and intellectuals from America were conscious of all this, or any part of it, as they sat on their café terraces and solved the problems of life and art.

Paris summed it all up; Paris *was* France; and yet, in a very real sense, Paris was not France at all. From the earliest times it has been the most cosmopolitan of cities, the crossroads of Europe and later of the world. The "grand and ancient city of

Paris," as the old historian François de Belleforest calls it, the home of the Parthesians, the "proud talkers," would seem to have been always, in the words of another old chronicler, "*locus deliciarum et lætitia populi*," a place of delights and the joy of the peoples. Ariosto had found it "made up and pieced together of all nations" and in his *Orlando Furioso* had stated that "there is not a land in Christendom that does not have citizens there." And a modern, Charles Péguy (in the beautiful translation of Anne and Julian Green) speaks of it as

the city that is the most insupportably cosmopolitan in the world; an orgy of nations; the most common crossway in the world; the caravansary of peoples; the most ancient of modern Babels; the confusion of tongues; the most modern of ancient Babels; a boulevard where everything is spoken excepting French. Particularly when people set themselves to talking Parisian.

The most international city in the world and the only really internationalistic one, the thoroughfare and sojourn of the peoples of the earth, of all the peoples; and a national city, even narrowly so, and nationalistic.

That Babel of tongues of which Péguy speaks is to be found all over Paris—sit in the café de la Paix in the place de l'Opéra or in any café along the boulevard des Italiens and keep your ears open; but it is above all observable in the Quarter of the Schools, along the Boul' Mich', and in the Montparnasse artists' quarter; for ever since the middle of the nineteenth century Paris has been the capital of the art world. It was in 780 that Charlemagne brought the English scholar Alcuin to Paris to found a school which was to be the beginning of the University of Paris, or the Sorbonne; and from that day to this students have flocked there from every civilized and many uncivilized lands. Until the fifteenth century this was the stamping ground of the Schoolmen, and Dante in his *Paradiso* alludes to the famous straw-lined "Fodder Street" (rue du Fouarre) where their disputations were held. Was it

not here that Rabelais's Pantagruel astonished the learned doctors and Panurge routed the "great English scholar," who may have been Sir Thomas More?

Nor have the character of Paris and the Parisians changed much in the course of the centuries. "For the people of Paris," wrote Rabelais four hundred years ago, "are so foolish by nature that a juggler, a pardon-peddler, a mule with bells, or a fiddler in the middle of the public square will gather a bigger crowd than a good evangelic preacher ever could." In the Paris of the 1920's it might be Josephine Baker discovered at the Folies-Bergères, a Dada soirée or exhibition of Surrealist art, a new dancer at the Ballet Russe, or a Negro jazz band from America—it did not greatly matter; Paris was hungry for the latest sensation. In this sense (and to a degree the same is true of New York City) it was seemingly naïve as no provincial city would ever be—would ever dare to be. Not so much a matter of naïveté, perhaps, as a readiness to be "shown," to let the *jongleur* display his wares, do his tricks; but as Americans say, he "had better be good," for reputations were unmade as quickly as they were made, overnight.

Such, the Paris that we knew and loved. Yet all the while the stream of daily living flowed on for the ordinary citizen: there was another very French and, as Péguy noted, intensely nationalistic Paris; two Parises existing side by side and one barely, when at all, conscious of the other. Did I say two Parises? There were many, any number of them. There was the Paris of the rue de Rivoli, the Champs-Élysées, the Étoile, and the Grands Boulevards; of the place de l'Opéra, the café de la Paix, the Madeleine, and the rue de la Paix; Montmartre with its *boîtes de nuit* and its semi-Americanized showmanship, its prostitutes, artists, workers, monks and nuns; the Paris of the Quai d'Orsay, the Chamber of Deputies, the Institute, the Palais de Justice, and Notre Dame; the Paris of the Boul' Mich' and the boulevard du Montparnasse; and, finally,

working-class Paris, scattered through the various outlying sections and the suburbs. These were but a few. And each near to being a world in itself which only now and then touched, overlapped, or came into conflict with one of the others.

As for us of the Rive Gauche, we were for the most part incredibly provincial. If we took a bus for the other side, to go to the American Express to call for our mail or cash a money order; to visit one of the smaller banks, probably near the place Vendôme, where we kept what small savings we had; to go to the American consulate, to the Bibliothèque Nationale for research, or to Brentano's in the avenue de l'Opéra to see if there were any new books or magazines from America —when we did this, it was like making a journey into a foreign country, and it was with an inaudible sigh of relief that we would descend from the bus in the carrefour Vavin, where we would at once make for the Dôme by way of assuring ourselves that we were back in the routine of our "Bohemian" lives. It was as if we lived in Greenwich Village and seldom or never got above Fourteenth Street. I am not saying that this was true of all of us, but it was a tendency that we all at least had to combat.

Assuredly, there never was another city like Paris and it is inconceivable that there ever should be. Today, in this second post-World-War epoch, we hear talk of a "Paris of the Western Hemisphere," possibly Mexico City or Quito in Ecuador; but if such a place were to come into existence, it would not be the real thing. It might be a pleasant enough place to live and work and sit in cafés, but that is all. The Paris that we knew is, it may be, gone forever; there is no use trying to recapture it. Paris, indeed, had no rivals even among the brightest of the European capitals. I have known Madrid with its Ramón Gómez de la Serna and its café Pombo, and the little Bohemias of Milan, Rome, Berlin (my memory of Berlin's "Quarter" in the 'twenties: a back room filled with homosexuals and drug addicts); and Vienna once was gay, had a song in its

heart—but it was Vienna, not Paris. For the paradox is: Paris is the most European of capitals and, at the same time, utterly different from any of the others, even the most typical ones.

When I wish to find a violent contrast to Paris, there is one city that comes to mind, a city which is everything that Paris is not, and that is Geneva, Switzerland. The other day I came upon a copy of a letter which I wrote to Richard Aldington in May 1928, giving my impressions of Geneva after some months' residence there. However much I liked Paris, just because I did like it so much, I never found it a good place to work, any more than I do New York City; and as I had a job to finish within a certain time, Aldington had suggested that the Calvinistic metropolis might provide just the environment I needed. It did. During the months that I stayed there, my typewriter was to prove my only refuge from the surrounding horrors. If it were not for the letter that lies before me, my impressions at this moment might not be so vivid as they are; for Geneva is a town one tries to forget.

I had gone on ahead, leaving my wife and the baby to follow the next day. Upon my arrival it was raining, and I ducked across the street from the station and took the first hotel in sight. It was a *Christliches Hospiz*, or "Christian Inn," which, I soon discovered, was another name for a den of wolves in sheep's clothing. As I entered my room—O memory of the Gideons!—the first thing I saw was three New Testaments in as many languages chained to the head of the bed—of course, they would be chained! From the dressing table I picked up a tract with the inscription: *Bitte mitnehmen und weitergeben*. Sauntering over to inspect the hotel regulations on the wall, I read in English: "Travelers are kindly requested, for the benefit of hotel employes, to avoid causing useless work on Sundays and holy [sic] days." This was followed by the news that a "family service" was held every evening in the hotel's *salon*, heralded by the ringing of a bell.

Riva and the baby arrived the next morning, which was Sunday, and we left after lunch on Monday. When I came to pay the bill, I had to fork over eighty Swiss francs, or sixteen dollars, for two days' board and lodging (without wine, which was *verboten*). To a prosperous-minded American this may not seem exorbitant, but to us who were accustomed to a modest European scale of living it was extortionate. "Christ!" I remarked to my wife as we went out the door, "How these Christians can rob you!" Setting out in search of a *pension*, we gravitated as if by instinct to what there is of a theatrical or bright-light district in Geneva; and when we finally came upon a house kept by a mincing male homosexual, we all but fell on his neck: it was such a relief to find a comparatively normal variety of perversion in this morass of righteousness. He provided us with board and a couple of rooms at three dollars a day where the *Christliches Hospiz* had charged us eight.

Our landlord and the Alpine scenery, the lake and the view of Mont Blanc, were about the only things that rendered life possible for us during our stay there. As for the rest of the town, it was for the most part another "Christian Inn," a realization that was brought home to me as I listened to the Protestant hymns from across the courtyard, the same Salvation Army tunes, often, that I had heard on street corners in America. The natives here, those that we met, were really grasping; they seemed to hate to give you your change back, even; they were pious, prudish, hypocritical—with all the repellent qualities of the Bible Belt inhabitants back home.

That was it. Geneva reminded us entirely too much of home, of the civilization we had left behind. Was not this the place where that civilization had originated? In any case, there was surely but one Geneva in Europe, just as there was but one Paris, in Europe or in the world.

It was not long after our arrival in Paris that we had a nightmarish sort of experience which, by cramming a lot into a

short time, initiated us as perhaps nothing else could have done so quickly and effectively into the lovable, not so lovable, and laughable qualities of the French with whom we were to live for the next seven years and more. It was a comedy of accidents.

We were residing at the time in Suresnes, on top of Mont Valérien, near the American Cemetery. We had been spending the evening with friends in Paris, who had seen us to the station to catch a last suburban train. (The baby was as usual at home sleeping, with the *femme de ménage* looking in.) Dawdling too long at the station café, we had to run for our train as it was pulling out. Our friends, thinking we had made it, had already departed. But we did not make it. There was nothing to do but take a taxi all the way to Suresnes; for there was the baby to think of. Then we made the disconcerting discovery that we had only a few sous to our name, along with a book of American Express money orders—but where could we get one of these cashed at that time of night? Leaving Riva in the station, I went across the street to telephone. I telephoned everyone I could think of, and everyone was out. Coming back, I met my wife in the custody of two *agents de police*, one on each side of her, grasping her sternly by the arm. They had picked her up as a prostitute! When I had rescued her, we decided to go over to the little all-night tobacco shop in the place de l'Opéra. The proprietor surely would cash a check supposed to be as good as currency. He wouldn't. Possibly he took us for a confidence-game pair, although he must have seen such checks before. As we were arguing with him, a pleasant-mannered American in evening dress came in.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I take it you are Americans and you seem to be in trouble. Is there anything I can do to help you?"

We told him that he could help us very much if he would cash one of our money orders for us.

"I don't happen to have the cash on me," he replied, "but if

you will come with me over to Harry's Bar, I'm sure he will be glad to cash it."

We went with him, and Harry—my first meeting with him—proved duly obliging. Whereupon we hailed a taxi and started for Suresnes. We had gone as far as the Bois de Boulogne when a heavy mist settled down upon us. Unable to see the road in front of him, our chauffeur pulled over to the side and, there in the middle of the Bois, announced his intention of waiting until the fog lifted. We waited for an hour or more. When we reached the bridge leading over the river to Suresnes, we found it closed for the night. There was nothing to do but proceed some seven miles upstream to the neighboring village of Puteaux, cross there, and come back along the other bank. At the foot of the steep-sloping rue du Mont Valérien our chauffeur stopped again and indicated that we should get out; this was as far as he proposed to go. It was purely a matter of temperament with him; he simply did not care to make the ascent.

At last we came to the house in which we lived on top the "mountain," but—where were my keys? I did not have them! Then I remembered that I had left them on the work-table in my ground-floor study (the baby and our living quarters were on the third floor). In endeavoring to force the window open, I broke the glass and slashed my wrist, which began bleeding profusely. Both my wife and I were alarmed. Didn't people commit suicide that way? I must be bleeding to death. Forgetting all about our infant son, we hurried to the nearest police station. I shall never forget how I stood there, spilling blood all over the floor, much to the disgust of the *commissaire*, as I pleaded with him to have me taken to the American Hospital at Neuilly, another suburb not far away. The police, quite oblivious to the gory mess on the floor, could only shake their heads and repeat: "*Pas de service médical la nuit.*" But when I mentioned that I would be willing to pay for an ambulance, the situation changed at once. That word "pay"

appeared to be a magic one. In a moment or so an ambulance was produced and I was on my way to the hospital.

A few hours later, some while after sun-up, we were home again, just as the baby, very considerately, was awakening for his breakfast. That evening taught me a good deal about the French. It likewise confirmed me in a theory I have held ever since, to the effect that one never really learns to speak a language until one has *suffered in it*—until, for instance, thinking one's child is dying, one tries to get a French doctor out of bed in the middle of the night. Then it is that one begins to "talk Parisian."

If I relate these personal experiences, it is because I believe them to be fairly typical of the process of acclimatization that we all had to undergo. For we were not all footloose by any means. Many had wives, and children who grew up speaking French and going to French schools, and some even bought modest homes in small country villages. We were not only exiles ourselves; we saw France as the home of our offspring, the generation that was to come. Those children—but that is another story. Most of them are back in America now, in their late teens or early twenties. As a rule they have forgotten every word of French they knew or have had to learn the language all over again in the classroom. France to them is but a dimming memory, half pleasant, half sad. The Great Depression and the war years have made Americans of them once more. But have they not, deep down, been touched and molded by it all? It is hard to believe that they have not been. Will they, like their parents before them, some day make the discovery of what it means to weep in the Tuileries by moonlight?

III

La Vie de Bohème

BACK in the Montparnasse of the 1880's and the 1890's there was a picturesque figure by the name of Alfred Jarry. To most readers outside of France he is not even a name, but every cultivated Frenchman is acquainted with the one masterpiece that this indubitable genius produced: the right Rabelaisian playlet, *Ubu Roi*, which is properly regarded as the outstanding modern work in the tradition of Rabelais, but which, by reason of its utter untranslatability, has remained practically unknown to the world at large. It was, however, for his vivid personality and the colorful "Bohemian" life he led as much as for the four or five books he wrote that he was noted, just as Verlaine was for his *absinthe verte* or Baudelaire had been for his green beard and his *Vénus noire*. The Jarry anecdotes are innumerable, but there is one in particular that would seem to hold a moral for those that look for it.

Living in one of the suburbs (Puteaux, I believe it was), Jarry was in the habit of returning home every night, no matter what the hour or what the quality or quantity of the wine he had imbibed, upon his trusty bicycle. One evening, having become sufficiently exhilarated at the *heure de l'apéritif* and perceiving that it looked like rain, he decided to make an early start; but he had not gone far when he was caught in the downpour. Now, as it happened, he had on a pair of new shoes that day and did not fancy the idea of getting them wet; so he stopped and took them off, then mounted again and resumed his homeward way. A good housewife who had come out upon a balcony for some purpose or other caught sight of him and stood staring open-mouthed. With matronly solici-

tude, she called down to him: "You poor young man, have you no shoes?" Pedaling vigorously along, Alfred shouted back: "Don't let it worry you, Madame. I have some nicely polished ones in my pocket."

I have hinted that there is a moral to the tale. There is. On no subject, perhaps, has there been a greater amount of sentimental nonsense written than on that of the so-called "*vie de Bohème*." Henri Murger has much to answer for! He, you may recall, was the penniless youth who, after having served a literary apprenticeship as Count Tolstoy's secretary, arrived at the conclusion that writers and artists like himself should secede from society and form a country of their own to be called "Bohemia." Had not his *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème* reached the operatic stage as Puccini's *La Bohème*, the damage might not have been so extensive; but as it is, the sorrows of Mimi have created a myth and a tradition, a myth that is constantly tending to take on life but never quite does.

The thing may be said to have started on an evening in 1830 when Théophile Gautier appeared at the première of Victor Hugo's *Hernani* wearing his flaming red vest. It certainly started with the mid-century romantics and their revolt against the cramping confines of bourgeois life; whence the red vest, the green beard, the hashish, the dusky Venus, and all the rest. The French say: *épater le bourgeois*; and this business of shocking the staid middle-class citizen has been going on for more than a hundred years. Just why the Left Bank and the boulevard du Montparnasse should have come to be the habitat of the tribe might be a bit hard to explain; one would have to explain why it is that Parisian intellectual life in general has so largely tended to center there. In any event, it was upon one of these terraces that Verlaine sat and sipped his absinthe:

J'ai bu ce soir une absinthe verte . . .

and there are still old-timers about the Quarter who can recall

his staggering home when he had had his fill. Today it is pernod, but the place remains Montparnasse. Montmartre had its day—in the early part of the century, when Picasso, Braque, Derain, and others were laying the foundations of Cubism—but it is back to Montparnasse that they seem to gravitate. Not even Picasso can stay away entirely.

In a preceding paragraph I have spoken of the “business” of shocking the bourgeoisie, and a business it has long since become so far as the bourgeois himself is concerned. The latter’s first reaction—in the 1850’s, let us say—may have been one of shocked surprise, but he very soon came to view the matter much as the housewife did as she watched the barefoot Jarry upon his bicycle: “You poor young man!” For these denizens of Bohemia *were* poor, very poor indeed, as a rule. And it did not take the canny bourgeois long to discover how the picturesque poverty of the real artists might be advantageously exploited.

Thanks to *La Bohème* and similar works, many persons doubtless still think of life in a place like Montparnasse or Greenwich Village as a round of gay, carefree revels interlarded with a little soul-satisfying labor on the part of the artist or writer. Legends have grown up which tend to perpetuate this conception, such as that of the kindly, whimsical Père Tanguy, where Cézanne used to leave his canvases to be sold at prices that brought him anywhere from eight to twenty dollars apiece. Most of us do not know that Renoir’s “Jeune fille dans un jardin” netted the painter six dollars, while his “Pont du château” earned for him eight dollars. When the same artist’s “Vue du Pont-Neuf” brought as high as sixty dollars, this was looked upon as a fabulous sum; twenty dollars for “La Source” was nearer an average; yet before the end of the century this last-mentioned canvas was to be resold for \$14,000!

Such is the not-so-romantic background to *la vie de Bohème*. It was when we Americans began arriving in the 1920’s that a

new form of commercialism sprang up alongside the older variety. The artist, especially the painter, was still exploited pretty much as always. In the past, this exploitation had been, so to speak, between one Frenchman and another; but now that the postwar influx of newcomers from all over Europe and the Americas, and above all, from that "land of gold," the United States, had set in, there were cafés, bars, restaurants, brothels, to be opened to cater to this new clientele. And so it is not strange if Montparnasse came to take on somewhat the aspect of the new and gaudy Montmartre—never quite so bad as that, it is true, but with a distinct air of showmanship about it nonetheless. The little *bistro* kept by two brothers at the corner of the boulevard Raspail and the boulevard du Montparnasse must be enlarged into the present café du Dôme; the café Select had to undergo a transformation of atmosphere; and not many years later the big and almost painfully modern Coupole was to open its doors. The Rotonde alone, a good deal less populous than it once had been, clung persistently to the character it had won for itself as a place where one could sit and think and be alone with his sorrows. It seemed that there now were few who cared to be alone—who wished to think?—in the noisy, crowded place that the Quarter had become. I do not know how it was in the early 'twenties; those who came over then tell me that a good deal of the old Montparnasse lingered on; but by the time I arrived in the middle of the decade, what with the ever-increasing third-class-tourist trade and "exiles" coming in by the boatload, the scene had begun to assume the appearance of a Bohemia made to order, with a suave proprietor in the background, rubbing his hands in unctuous satisfaction and keeping a watchful eye on "*la caisse*."

This was the Montparnasse that most of the expatriates found; for the bulk of the migration came from 1925 to 1930. Beneath it all a very real artistic and intellectual life went on;

but the workers tended more and more to retire to the Odéon or some other quiet quarter, to the suburbs, or to the provinces, while toward the end a number of what might be described as runaway colonies were to spring up, in Majorca, Cagnes-sur-Mer, Mirmande, and elsewhere. Few, however, were able to tear themselves away completely from the carrefour Vavin, which remained the exiles' crossroads and meeting place; and down in Provence in the late afternoon one would suddenly feel an irresistible impulse and would board an overnight train to breakfast at the Dôme.

Since the Hôtel Raspail (which, incidentally, was very respectable) had been recommended to us, my wife and I without any intention on our part found ourselves thrown into the midst of it all. We did not stay there long but soon moved to a suburb. Suresnes, Seaux, Fontenay-aux-Roses—each in turn was to be home to us. In 1930, when I became associate editor of *This Quarter*, we came back to Paris and, after a brief sojourn in the rue La Grange, down near Notre Dame and the Sorbonne, we took an apartment for one hectic season at Number 8, rue Delambre, practically above Lou Wilson's Dingo bar of *The Sun Also Rises* fame; it was also a few steps from the Dôme and directly back of the Coupole kitchen, which used to provide us with an orchestral accompaniment of rattling dishes. Later, we moved to the edge of the *midi*, dug in at Mirmande in the Drome, in the ancient province of Dauphiné, and I became a house-owner and taxpayer at a cost of three thousand francs, or about a hundred and twenty dollars in American money. But like all the rest of them, I would find myself catching that train for Paris, and my first words to the chauffeur at the *gare* would be: "Carrefour Vavin."

I will leave it to some future social-psychologist, who was not there, to explain just what the hold was that Montparnasse had on us: those two or three squares centering about the intersection of the boulevards. Why did the "exiles" tend to gather here in this garish environment, with so much that was

palpably false about it, to associate almost exclusively with other Americans and grow in upon themselves? Any satisfactory answer to this question would have to take into account the general atmosphere of postwar disillusionment which for Americans was given a literary expression in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, published in the fall of 1926. This novel, as Gertrude Stein well perceived, summed up the self-sensed hopelessness of a generation. If you couldn't throw the bottle, you could always drink from it, as Hemingway put it. And drink they did. It was not the first time that a book had been transmuted into real life. What of Werther and his sorrows? The creator of Werther did not commit suicide, but many of his youthful readers felt that such an act was the logical corollary to his work. Having put the theme into literature, Hemingway was now edging away from the setting he had described and was hard at work down in the Saint-Germain quarter even as, in the Dingo, young Americans just over were doing their best to imitate Jake and his "let's have another one" friends. Yet he would drift back now and then; and so would we all, for sheer and facile relaxation or on the chance of meeting someone worth while.

The Sun Also Rises may in fact be said to mark the point of cleavage between the earlier and the later batch of "exiles," by embalming in a work of fiction which was to become a modern classic the spirit that animated those who came in 1921 or shortly after. It was a literary post-mortem. Many of the original émigrés had been in the war or at least had fought and lost the battle of America that followed; whereas those who arrived in the late 'twenties were, frequently, of a still younger, unscarred generation—unscarred, that is to say, by anything other than the prosperity-crazed America of Calvin Coolidge, the America that preceded the crash of 1929. These latter had no great disillusionment to drown, they were not rebels, and often they were not genuine writers or artists and scarcely pretended to be. Paris at twenty-five francs to the

dollar had become a "cheapie," a far more exciting place to live than Greenwich Village with its bathtub gin and prohibition prices. It was "expatriates" such as these that availed themselves of the Hemingway tradition, claiming a heritage that was not rightfully theirs.

It would, however, be slanderous if one were to convey the impression that all Americans in the Paris of the later 'twenties were of this sort. What I have been trying to say all along is that the scene was a decidedly mixed one; and it was this very fact that lent it its garish colors and its peculiar fascination. There were many hard workers in the American colony, on both banks of the river. Ford Madox Ford had published Hemingway's *Torrents of Spring* and given impulse to a new and vital literary movement through the pages of his *Transatlantic Review*. A new and earnest group was coming up around *transition*, edited by Eugene Jolas and Elliot Paul; and in the next half-dozen years there were to be other magazines, schools of art, and literary-artistic manifestations of various sorts. The little box of a Dingo might be packing the tourists in nightly, tighter than the proverbial sardine; but some of us did manage to get some work done even after our friend Jimmy the Barman had forsaken Lou Wilson to open a place (or places, one after another) of his own.

On the Right Bank, in the neighborhood of the place de l'Opéra, there were the industrious newspapermen: John Gunther, in charge of the *Chicago Daily News* office, Bill Bird of the *New York Sun*, and others. At that time I was doing a Paris art letter for the *News*, and used to drop in to see Gunther occasionally. I was impressed not only by his industry but by his dignity, his assurance, his serious and intelligent interest in the European political and social scene. He would give a party at his home now and then, but it would be very different from those of the Quarter. The same was true of Bird and most of the other men I met. It was true, also, of the best men on the Paris staffs of the *New York Herald*

and the *Chicago Tribune*. On the latter paper was Waverley Root, who was later to write *The Secret History of the War* (the Second World War), and who was then conducting a literary page. Elliot Paul, at first literary editor and then city editor of the Paris edition of the *Chicago Tribune*, was seldom seen around the Dôme but belonged rather to the *transition* group of the place de l'Odéon quarter; he was one American who mingled with the French and had a passionate desire to know them. There was Ruth Harris, art correspondent of the *New York Times*, for whom I sometimes substituted, and there were Archibald MacLeish, Glenway Wescott, Bravig Imbs, George Antheil, and others, all of whom kept very much to themselves, the majority of Montparnassians not even being aware of their presence.

Within its own vaguely precise boundaries the Quarter had a social-artistic life quite apart from the cafés. This life centered in certain salons. When I first came to Paris, it was to the studio apartment of Ford Madox Ford and Stella Bowen that those Americans went who were fortunate enough to be invited and who cared to listen to the one-time collaborator of Conrad and discoverer of D. H. Lawrence as he reminisced of his yesterdays or discussed, with equal enthusiasm, the new and promising talents of today for which he was constantly on the watch. By reason of the *Transatlantic Review* and his having published Hemingway, Ford rather dominated the picture at the moment, and, being kindly disposed and wholly free of literary snobbishness, liked to gather about him those who had some respect for writing as an art with a great and noble tradition behind it. Later, after he and Stella Bowen had parted company, he started his Thursday afternoons and his much-talked-of sonnet-writing evenings, while Stella threw open her studio to British and American painters, writers, and others.

It was at her place one afternoon that I had the privilege of

a private lecture from Edith Sitwell on the subject of Rabelais. When informed by our hostess that this was the field in which I was working, Miss Sitwell had exclaimed: "I'm so glad to meet a scholar. I greatly prefer them to writers. I'm so tired of literary people! And now, do tell me all about Rabelais." Whereupon, she told *me* all about him.

There were other studios and drawing rooms that served as gathering places. One was the Montparnasse apartment of Bill and Mary Widney, where one was always likely to find some of the *transition* crowd or the monocled Tristan Tzara, founder of Dada, and a young French Surrealist or two. The Widneys were charming and intelligent hosts and they and their cocktail parties were popular. Lee Hersch the painter and his wife Virginia, the novelist (one of Ford's discoveries), gave interesting evenings at which one might meet almost anyone from the American colony, while over on the Île-Saint-Louis the Marvin Lowenthals had a serious-minded intellectual circle of their own. And Ossip Zadkine, the Russian-born sculptor, who speaks English beautifully and who for this reason was a friend of the Anglo-American contingent, would often have us in of an afternoon to view his work and talk of art with his French and Russian confreres. The conversation here was polyglot, witty, and rapid-fire, keyed to Zadkine's own quick-tensioned personality.

When the Surrealists congregated by themselves at the cocktail hour, it was often at the home of Bernard Faÿ, a professor at the Sorbonne then becoming known in America as the biographer of Franklin and Washington. In view of his choice of these democratic subjects, it seems strange that he should later have become a collaborator of the Nazis during their occupation of Paris, being appointed by them to the post of director of the Bibliothèque Nationale. I do not think that any of us could have been brought to believe that such a thing was possible, for Faÿ then appeared to be deeply and sincerely in love with the American democratic ideal. I can see him yet,

a little crippled man hobbling up to my table at the Deux-Magots. Like Louis Aragon, he spoke an English that would put the average American to shame, and he would talk fluently of his latest young protégé; for I was acting at the time as a kind of unofficial scout for the publishing house of Covici-Friede.

I do recall that it struck me as a little strange that Fay's interests should be, apparently, about evenly divided between the heroes of our American Revolution and the frivolous-capering Surrealists. There was something a little incongruous about it, for both were real passions with him. The Surrealists were forever at war among themselves, but in Fay's apartment the orthodox ones and the secessionists got along well enough together. It was a weird assemblage, speaking a weirder idiom. It was not that the language was surrealistic in character; both the actions and the speech of the guests reminded me, rather, of American homosexuals.

In the meantime, the one real salon in all Paris, possibly in all the world, in the eighteenth-century meaning of the term, was that kept by Nathalie Barney in the rue Jacob. Miss Barney was the Cincinnati, Ohio, girl who, arriving in France in the early years of the century, became the close friend of the late Rémy de Gourmont, to whom he wrote the *Letters to the Amazon*. It was to her place that Proust used to come, as Valéry, Gide, and others of the older generation still did. Miss Barney at this period was engaged in preparing a collection of letters sent her by famous writers, with a view to publication in book form. On a recent visit to England, she had spoken of the matter to Aldington, and he had brought us together with an eye to the American market.

She was good enough to ask me to her afternoons, and there I found a setting that made me think at once of what I had read in my youth of Madame de Staël and Miss Barney's other illustrious predecessors. There was the grace, the wit, the dignified *abandon*—everything but the powdered perukes—

which, so I imagined, must have characterized the salons of a former day. France's leading men of letters, Academicians, members of the Institute, Sorbonne professors, beautiful ladies, even a stray countess or two, were present, with the hostess to all appearances playing an unobtrusive role, although it was obvious that the "Amazon" was the center around whom all revolved. One had the feeling that this was not by any means due solely to her long association with de Gourmont, but rather was to be accounted for by the charm of her own personality, her swift intelligence, her ready and at times biting wit, her warm graciousness.

There was, certainly, nothing in America to compare with the rue Jacob, unless it was Muriel Draper's Thursday afternoons in the late 'twenties and early 'thirties, and there—well, the aged-in-the-wood atmosphere of the Academy, the Sorbonne, the Prousts, the Gides, the Valérys, was lacking.

On the afternoon that I first visited Miss Barney's, Paul Valéry, being absent, was the subject of conversation and there were some very sharp comments. It was commonly conceded in literary circles around Paris that Miss Barney had very largely "made" Valéry in the first place; for reputations, I found, were still being fashioned in salons like this, and what you heard in the drawing room one day you would not be surprised to read a day or two later in *Le Figaro*, *Le Temps*, *Le Matin*, or *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*. But now it seemed that M. Valéry, following his elevation to the Academy, was becoming a bit too sententious for Miss Barney's taste, and rumor had it that she was about to "unmake" him. After a number of typically Gallic two-edged remarks had been tossed about, including a few in damning defense of the absent one, Miss Barney spoke up. "*Le pauvre!*" she exclaimed, and quickly added: "By the way, have you read So-and-So's latest—?" I suspected then that what I had heard was true; and as a matter of fact, Valéry's reputation—in Paris—did take a sudden drop for a while.

My most amusing memory of Miss Barney's has to do with a certain elderly savant of the Sorbonne, a little birdlike fellow with a peaked gray beard who was bent on staying young. Among the guests was an exceptionally beautiful woman of the kind that radiates sex, and the aged Sorbonnist, whose lecture-room was a famous one, was getting more than his share of the refractions. He was like an old horse turned out to pasture that is trying to be a colt once more. He capered and cavorted, literally danced around the lady, who led him on most expertly, to the vast delight of everybody present. The conversation that accompanied all this as the professor made his whinnying exit was one whose subtle Rabelaisian quality Rémy de Gourmont himself would have appreciated.

It is probably safe to say that a large majority of Americans in the Quarter, or, as far as that goes, in Paris, had never so much as heard of Miss Barney and her salon. Pound and Aldington, who had known de Gourmont and were her friends, would look in when they were in town; Ford, Pierre Loving, and perhaps one or two others went there; but to the English-speaking colony in general the rue Jacob was as remote as all things French outside the *bistro*, the *café*, and the concierge, of their daily lives—as foreign to them as was Gallic culture as a whole: the literature, the art, the scholarship, the thinking of the country where they had chosen to take up their residence. How many of them, I wondered, had even heard of de Gourmont, much less read his work; yet at the time of his death, a little more than a decade before, he had been one of the most famous of modern writers.

The Americans were a good deal more likely to prefer such a "salon" as that kept by the Countess M——. The "Countess" was one of Montparnasse's outstanding characters. She was supposed to be of the Italian nobility, and if I put her title in quotation marks, it is not that we especially doubted her lineage; it is simply that none of us had ever seen her escutcheon,

nor did anyone care so long as she continued to serve good Scotch. She may very well have been a real countess, for we had seen other ladies whom we knew to be entitled to such a distinction—the Baroness Elsa, for example, friend of Margaret Anderson, Jane Heap, and the *Little Review* coterie—who in their way were quite as scatterbrained as she. Italian she assuredly was, as her swarthy complexion and her accent showed, and she had about her an air of distinguished dowdiness that reminded me of the late Mrs. Potter Palmer.

The Countess and her mysterious consort, who was rumored to be a captain of the Scottish Highlanders but whom we had decided to call Sam, were invariably short of funds; but that, too, was by no means out of keeping with the peerage or with a certain type of the military from across the Channel. And this little circumstance did not prevent the pair from giving, in their migratory apartment, what were, perhaps, the most lavish and the most outlandish parties the Quarter had ever seen. Lavish, that is to say, in a certain sense. There was sure to be champagne and caviar in the drawing room—the supply of these items was mysterious and unfailing—but out in the kitchen the Countess might be arguing with a tradesman over credit for a loaf of bread or two or a pound of coffee.

For she had a scheme for financing the ménage which sometimes worked and sometimes didn't and more often went with hitches. This scheme was the laudable one of making well-to-do Americans of the Right Bank and the tourist variety pay for the entertainment, and not infrequently the temporary board and lodging (a place to sleep against the wall), of "*les pauvres artistes*," meaning those whom she saw around the Dôme every day and who, she took for granted, must be as short of money as she and the captain were, in which assumption she was usually right.

I have neglected to mention that the Countess M—— was a painter of sorts, specializing in portraits of those she thought could pay for them. Some of her efforts were surprisingly

good, with a kind of unstriven-for Douanier Rousseau naïveté, but most of them were pretty terrible. She would "do" a portrait from memory (as Baudelaire once recommended) and without the knowledge of the "sitter," who would be shown the work of art the next time he called and at the same time would be informed that he "owed" the sum of 2,500 francs or whatever the traffic would bear. Occasionally there were protests, but usually not. The Countess knew her "patrons"—all too well in many cases. They were, commonly, moneyed dabblers in an overnight Bohemia who preferred to keep the "thrilling," the "exciting," experience wholly separate from their Right Bank or transatlantic existences; and they would accordingly pay without too much demurring. They would pay, and for a short while, a very short while, there would be bread and coffee to go with the champagne and caviar.

I recall one early morning when we all fell asleep around the Countess's "studio," propped against the wall as was our custom. As I dropped off, I had a hazy vision of our hostess engaged in earnest and voluble conversation with Abraham Lincoln Gillespie, who at the moment was the latest discovery of Eugene Jolas and *transition* and whose "works" were creating a sensation on the Left Bank, where he was a well-known figure. A Philadelphia high school teacher until he was tossed on his head in an automobile accident, Gillespie had ever since been talking like the "Work in Progress"—the nearest available comparison—and had recently begun to write in a manner that made Joyce at his most Joycean appear disconcertingly pellucid. Jolas, naturally, could not let such a find as this escape him.

And now, here they were, Linc and the Countess, standing in front of the latter's most recent canvas as she explained it to him in sputtering Italian, a language he did not understand, while he gave her his "criticism" in Gillespie-ese, which no one could understand. They were getting along swimmingly,

each with champagne glass in hand; and when I was awakened some hours later by a midday sun streaming through the window, the first thing I saw was a pair of very crossed eyes staring at me from the other side of the room. Linc was sleeping with his eyes open as he always did.

Speaking of our nobility . . . There was the "Duke of Montparnasse," the tall and impressive Billy West, who, dressed in the most impeccable Park Avenue manner, not infrequently in formal afternoon or evening attire, would saunter up and down the Boulevard past the terraces. The elegant, prosperous, affable "Duke" was our link with that American-international sporting world of the Right Bank of which we knew so little, most of us. Today, he will be found in the artists' colony at Woodstock, N.Y., where he is proprietor of the "Château Montparnasse."

Nor should one forget the Russian "Princess" who went by the name of Maria de Naglowska. Founder and sole member of a mystic cult, with weird neo-Egyptian rites, she would sit in the café Rotonde by the hour, reading from her own "sacred scriptures" to an "apostle" or two—that is to say, someone who had been unable to elude her—and then would go off into a most realistic trance. Her little publication, *La Flèche*, which she peddled around Montparnasse, had to do with new forms of "ecstasy," "body dynamics," and the like. She also spoke of dark mysteries which were celebrated on the Christian Sabbath. Talk to her a little while and you would discover that, like so many others about the Quarter, she was running away from something. In her case it was "those terrible Bolsheviks."

Meanwhile, in the Dôme across the street, sat Ilya Ehrenburg, the Bolshevik journalist.

There was, in short, never any lack of "characters" among us. One of the best known and most popular of these was Jimmy the Barman, whom many of us saw every night in the week. A one-time pugilist from Liverpool, he had started as a

bartender and then had set up in business for himself. Happy, generous, unbelievably guileless in the matter of credit, he was constantly going bankrupt and opening again in a new location, to which the entire Quarter would flock for more free drinks at the "Grand Opening." It was only when, after closing hours at his own place, he had imbibed a little too much at the Dôme that he became bellicose, and then presumably just to see if he had retained his fighting form. (He usually discovered that he hadn't.) The next day he would show up without his shoe-laces, and we would all know that the gendarmes had had to provide him with a lodging for the night. The shoe-laces were removed to keep prisoners from hanging themselves, and Jimmy's never could be found; there was a rumor to the effect that someone had bribed an *agent* and was making a collection of them. Invariably good-natured when sober and behind the bar, he would put up with any amount of ribbing on the subject from Herbert Gorman, Bob McAlmon, E. E. Cummings, or any of the other regulars.

I have met a good many barmen in my time, but I have never known another Jimmy. When a customer became impossibly obstreperous, our friend from Liverpool, who had borne everything with the utmost patience up to that point, would reach across the mahogany with a professional hay-maker and put the fellow to sleep, as gently and as painlessly as possible; after which, he would go out in front of the bar, pick the chap up, dust him off, and—as soon as the victim had regained consciousness—apologize to him. He then would call a taxi, with directions to the chauffeur to see the man safely home, and to top it all, would pay the fare! Is it any wonder that we loved him?

Later, under the title of *This Must Be the Place* (the tourist's customary remark as he sought out the rendezvous), Jimmy was to publish his ghost-written memoirs, which, with an introduction by Ernest Hemingway, were to have a very respectable selling success both in England and in America.

As Hemingway has pointed out, Jimmy the Barman, like Kiki, the famous Latin Quarter model, in reality marks the saddening end of an era whose gaiety was always vastly overestimated. Kiki was another of our personages. She has told her story in her own inimitable way in a small volume of reminiscences which was published in my translation (again with Hemingway as the preface-writer) some seventeen years ago. It is the story of more than one Parisian girl of the poorest class who, wavering between the life of a slavey and that of a prostitute, chances to drift within the orbit of the artists' world and there becomes a Montparnasse variety of queen. For the attainment of this distinction, personality is a good deal more important than mere looks. While Kiki in her prime had a face with which painters and photographers could achieve many effects, including a weird kind of beauty, she was certainly far from the American conception of what a model should be. Her figure, for one thing, especially as she grew older, was inclined to be dumpy; but she made up for it by a vitality and vivaciousness, a seemingly naïve yet not so naïve wit, and a genuine talent—she turned out to be quite a good painter, herself—that won her an unquestioned place in the annals of the ateliers.

She had first come into prominence by posing for Man Ray, the American-born photographer, but Pascin, Foujita, Kisling, Derain, practically all the leading modernists, had been her employers at one time or another and all were extremely fond of her. It was she who held the center of the stage at studio parties and at the café table. I especially remember her at cocktail time in the Coupole bar, with André Derain sadistically amusing himself by kicking the stool out from under her, a performance which he repeated almost nightly.

Jimmy the Barman and Kiki were, however, comparatively normal types in the Montparnasse of the 1920's, where eccen-

tricity was the rule and every college boy over for the summer felt that he had to grow a soulful beard, to be shaved off the coming fall, upon his return to the campus. Every kind of garment was in evidence, and only the ultraconventional stood out. It was a veritable House of all Nations, this: Frenchmen, Americans, Englishmen, Germans, Scandinavians, Spaniards, Italians, Russians, Hungarians, Poles, Bohemians, Czechs, South Americans. And for some reason, each nation appeared to have contributed its most extraordinary specimens.

There were, for example, the eight blond Icelandic giants who every night in the week were to be seen standing solemnly at the Dôme bar (*au zinc*), exchanging not a word, staring straight in front of them, and drinking themselves into a state of apparent rigidity; whereupon, with the precise motions of automatons, they would stalk out the door and into the night, down the boulevard du Montparnasse—to their studios, we assumed, for they were said to be painters: that was all that anyone knew about them.

And then, there was Aleister Crowley, from out the fogs of London—or was it Scotland, where it was rumored that he owned an estate? The author of the *Diary of a Drug Fiend*, sometimes known as “606,” used to parade around the Quarter with his head shaved, save for a waxed forelock which he called “the mark of Buddha” or his “Kling-Klong.” A pudgy man of fifty or thereabouts, he was addicted to kilts and plus-fours. His numerous specialties included black magic and devil-worship, alchemy, and hypnotism, and he would gravely announce a “revival of Satanism” as a literary school. He liked to tell of his orgies, which we believed were more imaginary than real. It was said that his bedroom was filled with mirrors, that he might never lose sight of himself. In addition to writing (his *Memoirs* sold for something like two pounds the copy under the counter in England), he

painted a little and for a while was employed in this capacity by the French government, until they parted company at the government's suggestion. Wambly Bald, the Montparnasse chronicler of those days, whose imagination far exceeds Crowley's own, informs me that Aleister's best canvas was one bearing the title "Three Men Carrying a Black Goat Across the Snow to Nowhere."

Mysticism (or pseudo-mysticism), freakishness, aestheticism, sex, went hand in hand on the Rive Gauche. There was Raymond Duncan, Isadora's brother, who with his disciples went about in Greek toga and sandals and who conducted a well paying school in which painting, eurythmics, and similar subjects were taught; while out at suburban Fontainebleau was a Turkish mystic by the name of Gurdjieff, who was supposed to have taught the great Ouspensky all that the author of *Tertium Organum* really knew. American society women would go there and pay a handsome fee for the privilege of scrubbing the floors, carting heavy loads of brick about the grounds, and engaging in other forms of manual drudgery, for the good of their fourth-dimensional souls; and when they had completed these tasks, they were rewarded by being subtly and metaphysically insulted by the Master at dinner, after which they would be entertained with a variety of music and dancing that was almost literally "out of this world."

A. R. Orage, the well known British man of letters and editor of the *New Statesman*, was associated with the Fontainebleau colony and helped to confer respectability upon the cult, while Gorham B. Munson gave it publicity in America. It was, accordingly, not strange if similar groups began to spring up in Montparnasse, with Margaret Anderson, Jane Heap, Mark Turbyfill, and others of the *Little Review* starting a "Gurdjieff Circle," which, under Miss Heap's leadership, met in the studio of Georgette Leblanc, famous for her long association with Maeterlinck. Now and then one of the less spiritual among us, by feigning a piety he did not

feel, would with considerable difficulty contrive to get inside the sacred precincts of the Master himself and would bring us back a report of the strange carryings-on.

Probably no one occasioned more gossip than did Willy Seabrook; and in his case, it was neither mysticism nor aestheticism, but rather sex—the peculiar forms of it that he preached and, by his own account and those of others as well, was in the habit of practicing. Willy loved to boast of his exploits: his flagellation of women, his instruments of sexual torture, his mania for human flesh, his adventures in the jungle. His account was so lurid that I am not sure how much of it was believed; but every once in a while some young woman would appear who would swear, with an abundance of convincing detail and a good deal of pride, that she had been one of his subjects and that all his stories were true as far as women were involved. We all liked Seabrook; there was an air of physical bigness about him—I can see his hulking shoulders as he entered a room—there was a vitality and heartiness that did not seem to go with decadent or morbid impulses. However, a number of weeks that I spent, in connection with a literary task, at his Mediterranean villa (he was in the money then), and long hours of conversation with him on the garden terrace at night over an especially potent bottle of Provençal *fine*, made me feel sure that he was indeed telling the truth; for he was an exceedingly honest person. At Toulon, he even showed me his private museum, consisting of a collection of instruments of flagellation and feminine torture, among them a cage for the amorous starving of a naked woman.

It all sounds more than a little like Sunday supplement stuff; and Willy, indeed, was proud of the fact that he had begun life as a Hearst reporter and editor.

He may have been very largely a Hearst man still in matter of content, but he had a flair for real writing, and his three

great literary idols at the time I knew him were Proust, Gide, and Cocteau. He particularly admired, I remember, Cocteau's *Les Enfants Terribles*. As for Gide—that was a sore spot. He had found in the French writer something which led him to believe that the author of *The Counterfeiters* ought to like the work of one who had written *The Magic Island*. But Gide didn't. William Aspenwall Bradley had given the latter a copy of the book; and after reading it, Gide said to Bradley: "I don't think I care to meet the man who wrote that." Seabrook was deeply hurt, and brooded over the rebuff; to him it was inexplicable.

With Willy, one always had the feeling that there was something driving him on—and drive him it did, through the asylum and to his death. He was another who was running away. The son of a minister, he was a fugitive from the Bible Belt; and while he might take the rites of voodoo with the utmost seriousness, I can hear his favorite expletive, "Hogwash!" when the Scopes trial or the attitudes of American fundamentalists were mentioned.

Not all our Montparnasse characters were picturesque or fantastic ones. Some were tragic: fine lives that had somehow been strangely twisted out of shape. I think of Homer Bevans—Homer, who would sit all day long on the terrace of the Dôme, a highball in front of him, staring off into space across the boulevards as though they were some illimitable plain, and then, when night came, would move around the corner to the Dingo to stand for long hours at the bar and be jostled by a crowd of strangers with only now and then some acquaintance to nod to him. Get to know him, as a few of us did (everyone knew him by sight), and you would find him to be gentle, generous, lovable, cultivated, and urbane; and this was the man whom Elliot Paul was later to take as the prototype for his detective story hero, Homer Evans.

He was a sculptor who had started life as an engineer. Having made his pile, or at any rate enough to live on, he had

given up engineering and turned to music, and had played in the New York Philharmonic Orchestra as a flutist. But music palled after a while and sculpture beckoned. And then, somehow, he had come to abandon music, sculpture, everything, for his highball glass. He kept this up for years, day and night, until he began losing his eyesight. It was then that, as in the case of Stearns, his friends intervened and brought him back to America.

I ran into Homer in Greenwich Village one evening, shortly after my return to the States. He was in the company of James T. Farrell, and it was the first time I had ever seen him perfectly sober, although I had never seen him visibly drunk. He was back at his sculpture, he told me, and did his best to appear interested in his work, but . . . There was something lacking, a gap that could not be filled—something, I fancied, like the void an opium smoker feels when the pipe is taken from him. I heard not long after that he had suddenly died.

It was frequently hard to draw the line between the eccentric more or less consciously exploiting his eccentricity and the real artist in whose brain something had slipped, or who, for one reason or another, seemed to have lost his hold on life. Sometimes, of course, it was artistic frustration, inability to face the fact that one was not, after all, a painter or writer and might as well have stayed in America and gone into butter and eggs or a stockbroker's office. This undoubtedly helped to swell the custom at Jimmy's and the other drinking places, but it was not an explanation that covered many of the cases we saw about us.

It was particularly disillusioning to encounter certain idols of one's reading youth who in their graying years had turned drably Bohemian or unpleasantly exotic. In this connection I am reminded of Frank Harris, with his waxed mustache, his rouged cheeks, his postprandial emetics (an imitation of the old Roman sybarites), and his memories of Shaw and

Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas. When he tired of his haunts in Nice, Harris would occasionally transfer to Montparnasse for a brief interval his growing paunch and dull-thudding quips. I had been interested in meeting him at first, for I remembered that this was the man who once had written one of the best of American short stories, "The Bomb," and who also had done a praiseworthy job as magazine editor in the muckracking era. Possibly I should have been warned by his *Life and Loves*; but I think that I was curious to see just what had happened to him.

We met one night at the home of a mutual acquaintance. The one other guest was a woman reporter, a brilliant young Irish girl. Upon being informed that we wrote for the papers, Harris at once threw his nose in the air and observed: "I don't think I care for journalists." It did not take us long to decide that we did not care for Mr. Harris, and we retired to a far corner of the room to amuse ourselves. The guest of honor was greatly put out at this and fumed and snorted for the rest of the evening, which was a short one as far as we were concerned. He reminded me a little of Mary Garden on one of her uppity days. He seemed to grow willfully more asinine as he grew older.

Emma Goldman was another disappointment, a far greater one than Harris. I saw her now most often on the terrace of the Select, surrounded by a group of Lesbians. I would look at her and memories would come flooding back: memories of college days, of *Mother Earth* read surreptitiously, of Strindberg and other European dramatists of whom we had never heard until she introduced them to us, of anarchist meetings, police raids, and newspaper headlines; memories of Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, of the *Little Review* epoch in Chicago, and the cult of "aristocratic anarchism." The Emma of the 1920's scarcely looked like the bogey-woman who once had frightened the American bourgeois out

of his slumbers. She did not even care to talk about those days, as I discovered when I met her one evening at a studio party at Virginia Hersch's, and naïvely tried to tell her what I felt I owed to her. She was bored. "Let's have another drink," she said.

For something had happened to Emma, and I thought I knew what that something was. It was the Russian Revolution of 1917. She had been to the Soviet Union and had not liked what she found there. The "revolution" had been betrayed. No free-love, do-as-you-like, individualistic-anarchistic paradise. She and the young Soviets had parted, some while since, with mutual recriminations, and she had become a bitter old woman whose one purpose in life, it seemed, was to hate—to hate and to forget. And it was so easy—or was it?—to forget in Montparnasse.

It is proverbial that the revolution must claim its victims, and these may be psychic as well as physical ones. Commonly seated beside Emma in the café was a younger woman who must have been very beautiful ten years earlier, and whose face, despite the inroads that Montparnasse had made upon it, would have been remarked in any company. The eyes, particularly, those eyes that had witnessed the "ten days that shook the world." As John Reed's wife, Louise Bryant had been not only a spectator but, for America, one of the chief chroniclers of the Russian Revolution, and along with her husband had become a heroic figure and something of a legend for our Leftward-looking intelligentsia. After Reed's death, she had married William Bullitt, who later was to be American ambassador to France. This marriage was not a happy one, and they were separated, after a daughter had been born. At the time I knew Louise she was drifting from café to café and was famous now for the daring studio parties that she gave in the early hours of the morning. She no longer seemed to care; yet, in contrast to Emma, she was invariably

warm, friendly, altogether likable; and never once did she speak of the past, nor would anyone have thought of questioning her about it.

Yet another who revived for me a golden age of intellectual exploration and discovery, when for the defiant undergraduate every heretical volume is a likely promised land, was Alexander Berkman, who would occasionally come up from Nice to visit Emma, his old associate in the anarchist movement. Sickly and starving in his last days, eking out a bare livelihood (when he succeeded in doing that) by means of translating chores, he was like a wraith out of a distant past. I have seen a number of individuals who were strikingly out of place in the vicinity of the Dôme, but none more than this gentle, kindly man who, on a day years before, had emptied his revolver into the body of the Pittsburgh steel magnate, Henry C. Frick, and who afterward had spent some fourteen years in prison. His *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* had been one of the books of my youth. I studied him now. Had he too lost hold of his life philosophy? There was a fire that glowed still in his eyes, but he was tired, very tired.

While some were endeavoring to forget, live down, their past, there was at least one member of the Anglo-American Left Bank colony who paid the penalty for being some decades ahead of her time. Few persons have been more misunderstood than Nancy Cunard. She has set forth her own case in an article which she wrote for the final (No. 5) issue of the *New Review*. Entitled "Black Man and White Ladyship," the article in question was a violent attack upon Miss Cunard's mother, Lady Cunard, and upon British upper-class society in general (with a side-swipe at George Moore) for its color prejudices. For Miss Cunard was defiant enough of conventions to have a black man for a friend. This created a scandal in London, a scandal which later was echoed by the columnists and sensational press of New York; but anyone who will read her statement will not fail to perceive that it was more than

a personal matter with her, that she was fighting for a principle. She was making in real life, and in the callous 'twenties, the same challenge which Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* was to make in later years.

Nancy Cunard was essentially an honest rebel against her class and what she took to be its narrow outlook; she had made a thorough study of Negro art, culture, and anthropology. A visit to her Paris studio, a talk with her there or at the *café Flore*, and one went away convinced of her sincerity.

But whatever the allowances to be made in individual cases, there is no denying that the scene as a whole presented an aspect that was fascinating to the psychiatrist—I sat with one of them at the *Dôme* and watched his reactions. Things finally came to such a pass that Edouard Roditi, at that time a contributor to Mr. Jolas's *transition*, now a well-known American scholar, announced with tongue in cheek his intention of founding a magazine whose contributors should be limited to "dipsomaniacs, dope fiends, schizophrenics, and Hindu mystics."

Illustrative of this, perhaps the most striking phase of Latin Quarter life in the *entre-deux-guerres* period, an incident comes to mind which nearly cost Ezra Pound his life.

Ezra was then associate editor of my magazine, and upon one of his visits to Paris those connected with the *New Review* decided to give a dinner in his honor at what was ordinarily a most sedate little restaurant in the place de l'Odéon, in the very shadow of Joyce, Stein, and Sylvia Beach's famous bookshop. Among others attending was Ford Madox Ford. Jean Cocteau was supposed to be there but at the last minute telegraphed me that he could not come. This was fortunate; for we did not know when we invited him that we were to have one of his bitter enemies, an under-cover Surrealist, in our midst. Things went along smoothly enough for a while;

indeed, it seemed that the evening was going to be a huge success—until the Surrealist, who, it turned out later, was under the influence of drugs, suddenly whipped out a long, wicked-looking knife from somewhere under his clothes and, turning around, made as if to plunge it into the back of Pound, who was seated immediately behind him.

Those of us who saw it were horrified and, for the moment, petrified as well. Luckily, Bob McAlmon, who was sitting next to Pound, had a little more self-possession. Seizing the assailant's arm, he tussled with him until someone from the rear came down with a well-aimed seltzer bottle, and that ended the fray. The dinner broke up in great confusion, with a frantic proprietor urging us to hurry and leave before the gendarmes arrived. As a result, Ford's speech in Pound's honor and Ezra's reply were never made. The American papers in Paris printed nothing about the affair, regarding it, for some reason or other, as too hot to handle.

There is another incident which, though it did not turn out to be so exciting as the one just related, has, I believe, a light to throw on the character of the Quarter in those days and the psychology of its inhabitants. It concerns the opening, a few squares from the Dôme, of a new streamlined, chromium-plated brothel, a most respectable institution of its sort, conducted under municipal supervision and known to the French by the charming euphemism *maison close*. We learned of it on the terraces one afternoon and at the same time heard its name—"the Sphinx." We should not have been excited by the news if it had not been for one unusual feature: it appeared that invitations to the "*grande ouverture*" were being sent out to practically everyone in the sixth *arrondissement*, and we were supposed to bring our wives! This was a characteristic Gallic touch, but sufficiently novel to stimulate our jaded interest. Not to mention the free champagne. As a result, the entire Quarter turned out, or so it seemed to one who tried to make his way through the crush that open-

ing night. Madame's invitation list must have been a *Who's Who* of love among the artists.

I shall not forget that gala occasion. Madame herself, matronly and dressed in black, was a model of propriety, and as I gazed upon her I knew that the Sphinx would be nothing if not respectable. The *bar américain* had been described to me, by someone who had had a preview, as "ritzy," but as I beheld its shiny all-metal furnishings, I felt that this was hardly the adjective. Up to then, the Coupole bar had represented for most of us the last word in luxury, for the more expensive Right Bank places were beyond our reach, and it was to the Coupole that we would repair when we grew tired of the dingy if historic surroundings of the Dôme. But all this modernistic splendor!

"You like it?" Madame inquired, with commendable restraint; for it was plain to be seen that she was bursting with pride. She proceeded to show us, one group after another, all over the house, including the bedrooms upstairs. Here I was not so impressed as with the bar: there was a connotation of Grand Rapids rather than of the new functionalism—although the inevitable *bidon* was functional enough.

"Is it not in good taste?" Madame kept asking us. "I myself," she added, "am a musician; that is why I love the artists. Yes," and she gave a sigh, "I play the violin. But *les affaires*, the Messieurs will realize, *les affaires* are so pressing. And one must live. . . ."

As for Madame's girls, young, pretty, with a peasant freshness about them, they were rather demure at the start, overawed by it all. Brought in from parts unknown, they were tremendously impressed by "*les artistes*"; but they speedily lost their self-consciousness and became almost, if not quite, as uninhibited as the guests, who were about equally divided between men and women. There was also the usual contingent of homosexuals, male and female, including a delegation of extremely effeminate young Surrealists; but the *filles*

of the Quarter were not present unless escorted, for they represented competition and Madame saw to keeping them out. All in all, it was very much as if the *café du Dôme* and the *café Select* had merged and moved to another location. Even the eight Icelandic giants were to be seen standing at the bar and going through their usual routine, as Kiki and Pascin in the center of the floor did their own unrecognizable version of the Charleston. Madame, meanwhile, was radiantly pleased by it all, pleased that her house was being honored by the presence of so many celebrities; but she could not help being a trifle worried about her beautiful new fixtures.

Among the guests were a number of married couples, and they were by far the most interesting to watch. They obviously were finding the event charmingly risqué; but one could not help wondering if the staid and eldering pair of the 1940's would be likely to mention it over their suburban bridge-tables. Probably not. In this respect Steve and Emily Braden, as we may call them here, were typical. They were sitting at a table with two of Madame's girls, who were insisting that they all four go upstairs together; and both Emily and Steve were getting the thrill of their lives. The Bradens were known to everybody, and everybody liked them. He was on what might be termed sabbatical leave from the knit-goods business in Racine (or was it Kenosha?), Wisconsin. Like Harold Stearns and the other Young Intellectuals, they had become disgusted with a money-grubbing America—after having, fortunately, grubbed enough to be able to escape in comfort—and had migrated to the Left Bank to bask in the aura of Joyce and Stein, to entertain the up-and-coming young Surrealists, and to discuss Freud and psychoanalysis at the *Dôme*. They were not wealthy, but compared with most of us they were plutocrats. We had more or less ceased to be conscious of the fact, however, and had come to accept them for what they were, but they seemed unable to forget it; it

appeared to be on their minds, and tonight they were trying hard to throw it off, for they had been very much hurt recently by a certain young novelist's portrait of them in his latest book.

Upon looking around the room, I had the feeling that most of the others, likewise, were doing their best to forget, or not to remember. The scene, certainly, was not one of wild abandon. As a matter of fact, to one who was familiar with the other rendezvous of the Quarter and who had not had too much of Madame's very good champagne, it presented much the same aspect as did the Dôme on a bleary morning when one entered it, sober and out of sorts, for a cup of coffee. Why, then, go to the trouble of moving over here? But after all, I suppose, a migration of two or three squares was a great event in our sedentary lives. The young women of the establishment, so far as could be observed, were as pure as when we came. They were merely an excuse. An excuse to meet the same faces once again and repeat the all too familiar gestures, conversations, and witticisms. If this was "*La Bohème*," it was assuredly not as the good burgher imagines it.

It was, perhaps, not strange that Ilya Ehrenburg from his daily chair in the *café du Dôme* should have been led to predict, as he was fond of doing in that era, the downfall, the death, of Western civilization. With his powerfully set, stooping shoulders that gave him almost the appearance of a hunchback, he was one of the human landmarks of the *carrefour Vavin*. He did not associate much with the Americans, and I do not believe that any of us came to know him well. He was occasionally to be seen at a table with Louis Aragon and some of the other young Frenchmen, but most often he sat alone. He would raise his eyes from time to time above the edge of his French or Russian newspaper, to let them roam over the blaring room as he observed the antics of a

group of rowdy "artists," in all probability Americans; the next moment he would drop his gaze as if abashed at what he had seen.

Had anyone asked him what he took to be the meaning of it all, he would have given much the same answer as Herr Spengler. This was the answer that he did give in an extremely interesting book of essays which he published in the mid-'thirties, under a title that might be translated as "Slow Curtain" (literally, "Long-Drawn-Out Denouement"). To him, the curtain was surely falling on the culture of the Occident. In support of this view, he would point to the Surrealists, their foolish pranks, their meaningless (as he saw it) "*enquêtes*," the perversions that they paraded with so infantile a delight. He would speak of the "rout" that had recently been given by Monsieur and Madame André Maurois at the Ritz, with, in place of guessing games, Jean Cocteau providing the amusement by baptizing in due sacerdotal form his newborn godchild. He would cite as a further instance of decay the *mondain* Paul Morand, gliding through life on a cushioned diplomat's passport and depicting the eternal feminine in the same eternal bourgeois setting, whether London or Siam—Morand, who wanted his hide when he was dead made into a traveling bag. Or it might be the new dog-restaurant that had just been opened in Paris, where they served a ten-franc meal for canines while artists and workers starved. Or that dinner of epicures, not long ago, when they feasted upon a lioness from the zoo. . . .

Yes, Ehrenburg had an answer, "those Russians" had an answer, which for them was *the* answer. Coming out of the East, they told us, even in the *café du Dôme*, that our Western world was not merely sick but dying, and they proved it to us with case histories; after which they bade us look around, there in Montparnasse, at the supposed representatives of that culture whose doom they were foretelling. Yet Ehrenburg continued to live in the Latin Quarter, on the Left Bank and

not on the Right, and he still came to the Dôme every day and sat there a good part of the day. It is hard for the writer, the artist, to break with his own—or the nearest imitation of it that he can find.

Across the street in the Rotonde, meanwhile, sat Russians of a different sort, "white" Russians, who felt that the Revolution had robbed them and who hated everything for which Ehrenburg stood.

The "new" Russians were not the only ones who had an answer. There were those who told us that the danger was from the East: the Occident threatened by the Orient. Chief among these were Massimo Bontempelli and his *Novecentisti*, or Twentieth-Century Group. Bontempelli, with the sculptured head of a Caesar, would stand on the corner by the Rotonde and watch Ehrenburg's stooping figure cross the carrefour Vavin. This did not mean to me then what it does today as I look back upon it, in view of all that has happened since, the course that world history has taken. *We profess for the Orient an inborn and cherished contempt. I hate the belly-dance and the whole body of Asiatic revelation.* The words were Bontempelli's, but the voice was that of Mussolini. The words were big and bold; yet "*I giovani*," as they were fond of calling themselves, were anything but bold. Speak to them of politics—it was best not to do so, and, above all, Il Duce's name should not be mentioned—and they would "talk with their eyes." I used to sit in at their gatherings in the little café de la Consigne, opposite the gare du Montparnasse, where they frequently joined forces with the Spanish playboy Ramón Gómez de la Serna and his followers, when Ramón chanced to be in Paris. One would never have known from the conversation there, brilliant as it was upon occasion, that such a thing as politics or a social order existed.

Lack of any concern with society was a trait that was common to most of us; yet all the while, had we but been aware of it, the larger world was closing in upon us. In that home

of purgatorial souls, the Rotonde, we encountered more than one exile of a different kind, who had fled his country not for any aesthetic reasons, but simply because he refused to live under a regime of tyranny. We saw and spoke to Miguel de Unamuno, Primo de Rivera's victim, as he sat there with his own Unamuno-esque variety of inferno, penning that passionate, unclassifiable bit of prose which he entitled "How to Write a Novel," the "novel" being the cry of his own tortured spirit. This was a piece which I later translated and which I published in *The New Review* and in *The European Caravan*. Unamuno's was truly a "historic anguish":

To live in history and to live history, to shape myself in history, in my Spain, and to shape my history, my Spain, and, along with it, my universe and my eternity—such has been and is ever my one tragic concern in this my exile. History is a legend, that we know; and this legend, this history, is devouring me, and when it is through, I shall be through. . . .

All this within a literal stone's throw of the Dôme. The Greek professor from Salamanca, who with his gray Vandyke, his black crush hat, and his spectacles looked exactly like a Greek professor, might have taught us much. As it was, his conversation was confined to a few fellow countrymen, exiles like himself.

The carrefour Vavin neighborhood did not, of course, constitute the entire Latin Quarter, though this was a fact which we who lived and congregated there tended to overlook. When one went over to the rue de l'Odéon, for example, it was like stepping into another world. Here, at any time of the day or night, a sacrosanct stillness seemed to prevail, which, I sometimes fancied, must emanate from that shrine of literary pilgrims, Sylvia Beach's bookshop, commercially known as Shakespeare & Company. For these were the haunts of Joyce and Stein, both of whom lived not far away and neither of whom was ever seen near the Dôme. The author

of *Ulysses* was well fended against intrusion, but there was always the chance of the true worshiper's being admitted to the presence, while the others, browsing and buying at Miss Beach's, would revel in the thrill of propinquity.

This was the quarter frequented by Eugene Jolas, Elliot Paul, and the *transition* group, and by certain young Irishmen, friends and admirers of Joyce: Thomas McGreevy, Samuel Beckett, George Reavey, and others, the Dublin intellectuals being in the habit of gathering at the École Normale, where McGreevy and Beckett were instructors. Beckett and Reavey were often seen on the boulevard du Montparnasse, Jolas and his American associates very seldom, for they were workers rather than café-sitters. One might or might not agree with the "Revolution of the Word" as set forth in the pages of *transition*, but one hardly could challenge the seriousness of its propounders.

Across the street from Miss Beach's was the French bookshop of Mlle. Adrienne Monnier, *La Maison des Amis des Livres*, and from there to the offices of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in the rue de Beaune was but a step. For the place de l'Odéon was a time-honored center of intellectual life. Mademoiselle Monnier was regarded by many as being the strong woman of contemporary Gallic letters, and her place, at once a bookshop and a salon, was the rendezvous of many famous writers, the starting point of more than one modern movement, and, in general, the home of *avant-garde* literature, which found an expression in the review known as *Le Navire d'Argent*. Here again, despite the note of modernity, the atmosphere was one of intense earnestness and accomplishment.

Leaving the rue de l'Odéon for the boulevard Saint-Germain and walking toward the place Saint-Germain-des-Prés, one came upon still another quarter, that of the Deux-Magots, with the little café Flore close by, where the "seceding" Surrealists—Ribémont-Dessaignes, Robert Desnos,

Georges Hugnet, Monny de Bouilly, and others—held forth. The café des Deux-Magots itself was something like neutral ground, a vague No Man's Land between opposing camps and between the Right Bank and the Left, being a favorite resort of journalists and of Sorbonne professors invading another Bohemia than the one to which they were accustomed in the vicinity of the Boul' Mich'. It was to the Deux-Magots that one took a new acquaintance when uncertain as to just how to place him. The atmosphere as a rule was a tranquil one, a relief to Montparnassians who wanted to get away from it all. Of an afternoon one might find Hemingway there, or Ezra Pound if he happened to be in Paris; and of an evening, Ford Madox Ford would likely be seated at one of the tables, surrounded by a carefully chosen audience of two or three.

Crossing the place Saint-Germain-des-Prés and going down the rue Bonaparte, past the shops of the antiquaries and the old-book dealers, to the embankments of the Seine, one at once became conscious of the atmosphere of the Beaux-Arts and the Institut, of the Academy and academicians—an aroma of the past. Along the river were the stalls of the *bouquinistes*, known to every tourist, where four centuries of French literature lay slumbering in dusty bins. Molière, Montaigne, La Rochefoucauld, Racine—how many volumes had found their way from there to the shelves of my library! I remember how elated I was the day I came upon a book published during Rabelais's lifetime, about the period when he was writing his *Pantagruel*. This was not a dead past; it was one that lived and breathed. I thought of Proust, Gide, Valéry; they appeared to me to have a connection with these stalls; they represented a prolongation of that past. And then I would recall our latest hyper-aesthetic café argument and it would seem, somehow, very futile.

Following the river in the general direction of Notre Dame until one came out in the place Saint-Michel, one found him-

self in the Quarter of the Schools, a quarter which for some seven centuries had been riotous with intellectual life. I do not believe I ever went down the Boul' Mich' without thinking of that vagabond, thief, cut-throat, pimp, and poet, François Villon, who once swaggered along this same thoroughfare. The students of today were as brawling a lot as any Villon knew. It was political questions that stirred them now, and there were Rightist or Leftist demonstrations nearly every week, with the *Action Française* monarchists as the chief inciters. These young men and women were a good deal more aware of what was going on than we of the boulevard du Montparnasse; that looming battle which we but dimly sensed was here taking tangible form. And all the while, M. Bergson's lecture room at the Sorbonne was crowded with society ladies whose limousines stood waiting for them; even they were aware of something that was in the air in those days.

A good place from which to view the life of the student quarter was the café de la Gare in the place Saint-Michel, especially of a morning when the polyglot throng came trooping in for a coffee and crescent before going to classes. As the square outside rapidly filled with buses, trams, and human beings, and the chestnut-vendor and the old woman selling papers cried their wares, one might listen to an animated argument at a near-by table on any subject from the higher calculus to what happened yesterday in the Chamber of Deputies. With it all went the inevitable buoyancy and unaffected lightheartedness of youth—how old we of the carrefour Vavin seemed by contrast! Or one might drop in of an evening at the café Cluny, a short distance down the boulevard. This was the favorite haunt of Sorbonne professors in their hours of recreation. I preserve a delightful memory of two aging members of the Society of Rabelaisian Studies who one night spent several hours debating, over a bottle of Vichy water, the true significance of Pantagruel's mighty

thirst. But one could also hear discussions of Freud, Bergson, Husserl, Levy-Bruhl, Kierkegaard . . . all without the stimulation of *fine* or pernod or the titillation of sex.

All of us discovered from time to time this real and original Latin Quarter of which our own was but an offshoot and, to a large extent, an imitation. We would come upon it in the course of an afternoon's stroll—walking off a hangover, it might be, from the night before—and then we would return once more to our accustomed places at the Dôme, the Coupole, or the Select, to resume our discussions of art and America and the artist soul and to revel in the “freedom” we had so bravely achieved.

IV

When Main Street Came to Montparnasse

A BRIGHT, sunny day in Montparnasse, bright between the unfailing Parisian showers. The terraces are crowded, with the exception of the Rotonde, which is deserted as usual. Things have been a bit dull of late, but, fortunately, it does not take much to provide entertainment. Conspicuously seated at the Dôme is a gaunt-looking chap with a shock of reddish hair. He is obviously expecting that he will be noticed. I say obviously, for we have seen his kind before and know the symptoms. We are in the habit of calling this type, as distinguished from the ordinary summer tourist or vacationing college boy, the "big shot from home." Now, there is a curious telepathy, a kind of grapevine, that operates between those terraces, and within a very short while every one on all three of them is aware that the visitor is none other than Sinclair, or "Red," Lewis. At the same time, through a seemingly tacit and simultaneous understanding, all those at the Dôme appear to be agreed that no notice whatsoever is to be taken of Mr. Lewis's presence.

It is the slap direct from the Joyce and Stein brigade to the literature that is being produced in their native land; it is their retort to *Main Street* and *Babbitt* and, as they see it, the stenographic, Pullman-smoker school of writing, which they do not consider writing at all. It would be hard to say how much, if any, of this Mr. Lewis gets; but, in any event, he very soon makes his exit, and as he does so his face is about the color of his hair. There is an unuttered snort as he stamps

out, and a giggle, becoming a laugh, runs around the tables and spreads down the street to the Coupole and across the way to the Select. It is sufficient amusement for the next couple of hours, something to tell the latecomers about.

This incident, perhaps, may have had something to do with the violent feeling which Mr. Lewis later displayed toward the Parisian variety of American aesthete. At any rate, it brings out a characteristic attitude on the part of the "exiles." Even Montparnasse and Greenwich Village did not mix, as was shown by the humorous saga of Maxwell Bodenheim in the Quartier Latin.

Having made a little money with his novel *Naked on Roller-Skates*, and being unable to resist the lure of the third-class-tourist, Max had finally come over for a short stay, in the early 'thirties. That he had delayed his coming so long, was in all probability due to a premonition that he would be in danger of passing unnoticed here. He must remedy that; and so—still on the proceeds of those famous roller-skates—he must buy himself a dinner coat and stun us all. He did precisely that, and at once and inevitably became "Count Bruga" to the cafés. Highly offended, he shifted to a green beret and proceeded to snub us by taking up with a Daring Young Woman on the High Diving-Board, a performer in one of the outlying Parisian amusement parks.

How the two ever got together remains a mystery, for the lady, a mid-European by birth, had an English vocabulary that was practically limited to "You are ve-ry nice" and "I think that is lofly." Undeterred by this, Max would sit at the Dôme, at the most conspicuous table he could find, and read his poems by the hour to "*la plongeuse*," who would drink it all in, smile sweetly at the conclusion of each piece, and murmur: "I think that is lofly!" Meanwhile, if any American came near, Max would glare at him and cut him dead.

The climax came on the night of the Quatz' Arts Ball,

which is the most hilarious affair of its kind to be found anywhere, with scantily draped models, as the evening grows late, throwing off what few clothes they had to begin with. Max and La Plongeuse were there, the former with a dinner coat by this time a little the worse for wear, but with his dignity unimpaired. If there had been a box, they would have occupied it. As it was, they sat there in solemn state and surveyed the vulgar, roistering throng; and then Max produced a packet of poems from his pocket. This was too much. Kiki, who *would* chance to be passing, snatched up a seltzer bottle and—her aim was excellent. With a scream, La Plongeuse dived for the door and Maxwell followed, picking up his poems as he went.

It is not to be thought that we treated all our visitors from home in this fashion. The celebrities were constantly coming and going, and the self-centered colony as a rule paid little attention to them. We did not, for example, realize that the quiet, unassuming young man whom we met at Bill and Mary Widney's and who was introduced to us as Thomas Wolfe was soon to become the famous author of *Look Homeward, Angel*. We did know who Elmer Rice was and gave him at least one typically Montparnasse vodka party in my tiny rue Delambre apartment. There must have been not less than a hundred people packed into those two small rooms—hall-bedroom size—and I can still see the bewildered look on Mr. Rice's face as he stood there squeezed against the wall while Monny de Boully the Surrealist explained to him how he ought to have written *The Adding-Machine*.

There were others, though not many, from the theater—I think of Eva LeGallienne in particular—who passed through the Quarter from time to time; but the Hollywood of that day, fortunately, had not discovered us, and we were comparatively free of the visiting celebrity. Now and then, one of the deep-rooted American writers whom we respected, such as Sherwood Anderson or Alfred Kreymborg, would

slip into town, but we saw little of them. Kreymborg associated with the Jolas-*transition* group and Anderson, also, stayed in a little hotel near the Odéon. They were different from Lewis; we felt that they should have been with us; but, as in the case of Dreiser, Paris did not "take" with them. Occasionally, too, we would be surprised to discover some figure of a former day who had been living among us for years without our being aware of it. Wilbur D. Nesbitt, for instance, one of the authors of my boyhood days, had an apartment at the Hôtel Raspail.

If we did not get along so well, always, with Americans from home who had come over to see how and what we were doing, what it was we found in Paris, it cannot be said, on the other hand, that all was harmony in our own ranks. Anything but. The Left Bank as a whole was gregarious rather than collective, and the tendency was to go in little groups within the larger mass. This was especially true of the Americans, who had carried over many of their transatlantic feuds, coteries, and snobisms. The literary-artistic warfare that was waged by the French often took on what seemed to us an internecine intensity; but, when all was said, there was something impersonal, abstract, something disinterested about it as contrasted with the bitter and frequently unreasoning hatred that existed among the expatriates. Possibly it was just because we *were* so far from home and were unable to agree upon our reasons for leaving home—those reasons could be so important! However this may be, the feuds were numerous and sometimes laughable. It was the café that served as the common meeting ground, where one might or might not nod to the enemy, depending upon one's own humor and his, the state of the ever variable Parisian weather, the comparative adequacy of the little charcoal-burning stove that was supposed to heat the terrace, how well one's work had gone that day, or some other tangible or intangible factor.

Perhaps the most amusing of the quarrels was the one

of long standing between Gertrude Stein and her brother Leo, the painter and aesthetician. The two had not spoken for years when, passing down the opposite side of the street, Gertrude forgot herself and nodded. She was so overcome by this that she at once went home and wrote a poem which is now one of the Steinian classics: "She nodded to her brother . . ."

As has been said, we were not hard to please in the matter of amusement. In fact, we were rather astonishingly naïve, for the most part. There was always something to keep the tables buzzing. If it was not a Sinclair Lewis or a Maxwell Bodenheim to whom we had accorded what we considered a fitting reception, or one of the many rows between groups or individuals that were constantly brewing or pending, there was sure to be some escapade on the part of one of our "characters," or some "wild party" that had just been given and had to be hashed over.

There was the time, for instance, when a more than usually ingenious, not to say diabolic, individual had gone to a studio affair clad only in a loin cloth consisting of strings of chocolate caramels, which he invited his host and the other guests to sample, presumably until he should be stripped. The great stripping act did not come off, however, at least as far as the gentleman with the caramels was concerned; for inside each of the candies was one of the strongest laxatives known to pharmaceutical science, and within a very few minutes the party was deserted, the *cabinet* being quite inadequate to accommodate the rush. For a week or so afterward, there was an epidemic of diarrhea in Montparnasse.

Or it might be the exploits of Linc Gillespie and his friends. There were three of them who went around together: Linc; a medical student acquaintance of his; and a young millionaire, quiet and respectable, who was the owner of a beautiful Lincoln car. Whenever Gillespie and the medico ran out of funds they would promptly sell the Lincoln to the first

Frenchman who would buy it, and then would drink up the proceeds. The owner would always have to come around and, with a vast amount of difficulty and Gallic red tape, retrieve his car. The scheme worked very well until, one day, they made the mistake of trying to dispose of the Lincoln to a police officer who had been on their trail for some time. As a result, they found themselves up before a French magistrate. Things might have gone hard with them if it had not been for the fact that the magistrate in question happened to have a sense of humor—a rare thing in one in his position—and, moreover, in his youthful days had himself been a “Sunday painter” and a denizen of Bohemia. He accordingly let them off as lightly as he could.

The Left Bank would not have been all it was, there would have been something lacking, and gossip, for one thing, would never have traveled so fast, we should not have been so *au courant*, if it had not been for Wambly Bald and his “*Vie de Bohème*” column in the Paris edition of the *Chicago Tribune*. Probably no columnist was ever more avidly read than he. He employed a sphinxlike idiom which was wholly unintelligible to the place de l’Opéra tourist and to those aristocratic Americans who dwelt in the neighborhood of the place de l’Étoile, but which we of the Rive Gauche understood perfectly, as a rule, and appreciated to the full. Not always, however. Of necessity, he would often merely hint at things and we would then have to run them down for ourselves. He had a style that was somewhere in between *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *The New Yorker*, with a dash now and again of James Joyce or the Surrealists. It was a truly uncanny amalgam of prose, the like of which was never seen before or since.

The column, in short, was as unreal-sounding as its author’s name. We knew very little about Wambly beyond the fact that he came from Chicago, had been graduated from the University of Chicago, and was in the habit of wandering in

and out of the Quarter like a slightly alcoholic ghost, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, and telling all. If we knew little about his background, he was inclined to tell us less. Like Henry Miller and so many others, he seemed to spring up and grow in the soil of his own "Bohème." But we sometimes suspected that he might be a genius in disguise—a genius too proud or too indolent to work at the trade.

Life in Montparnasse was not all on the amusing side, however. There was the case of Hart Crane, one of the finest of modern poets, a case that has already gone down in American literary annals: his savage, furniture-smashing battle with police at the café Select; his imprisonment in the Santé and the merciless beatings given him there; the excitement in the American colony over getting him out; and then, a little later, that tragic homeward bound voyage from Mexico and the suicidal leap from the ship's rail as the author of *The Bridge* dived to his death—the legend of the shark that rose to meet his body. And Hart Crane was not the only one; there were to be others.

If there was occasional tragedy, there was also for many the dull grind of daily hardship, a strapping poverty and the suffering it entailed, which made it hard to manage a smile in the café at night when someone else was buying the drinks; for despite all the tales of the gay Bohemian life, it is not so gay to go to bed without the few centimes for a *café-croissant* in the morning. One *can* starve in the Latin Quarter. I've seen it happen.

I saw it happen with a poet of the old school whose name is wholly forgotten now but who was a great friend and protégé of Ezra Pound's. I am referring to Cheever Dunning. In the last stages of tuberculosis and living in a room that resembled the traditional garret, Cheever was hungry most of the time and, some of us discovered, would actually go about picking up scraps out of the gutter. Pound and others

helped him when they could do so without hurting his feelings; for he was extremely proud and reticent and endeavored always to conceal his penury by putting on an air of cheerfulness or detachment. There was, simply, no means by which he could make a living. Finally, he sold some poems to an American magazine published in Paris, but the editor kept putting him off, insisting that he paid only on publication, and publication was long in coming. In the meantime, Cheever died.

All Montparnasse, one might say, turned out for his funeral. Interment was in a suburban cemetery some distance from Paris and we had to take chartered buses to get there. It was a cold winter day, with that peculiar kind of Parisian cold that eats into your bones. We mourners were a silent, shivering lot, sad and thoughtful, and angry with the editor, whom we blamed for our friend's death. As if the few francs Cheever might have got for his poems would have saved his life! (The poems afterward appeared and I never heard of the poet's "estate" benefiting from them.) Here was the starving artist legend of the old days taking on reality, and it was a reality that we did not relish. Back in Montparnasse once more, we ordered pernods to "warm us up," and that night it seemed as if everyone in the Quarter were drunk.

I saw it all but happen, also, with one of our best contemporary novelists, James T. Farrell, and his wife Dorothy. They came about as near starving as anyone could. But that is a story in itself.

One day, as associate editor of Edward Titus's *This Quarter*, I received a large packet of short stories, postmarked Chicago and bearing Farrell's signature. I took them home with me along with some other manuscripts that night and started reading them.

"These get better and better," I remarked to my wife.

"Have you discovered another genius?" she asked, a little sarcastically.

"I don't know—yet. I think maybe I have."

For this was my own Chicago that was coming to life in these tales and sketches of back-o'-the-yards "punks." Of course, I never knew the back-o'-the-yards as Farrell does, but I knew enough about it to realize that this was the genuine article. I was enthusiastic, to put it mildly. That very evening I dashed off a note to the author: "I think your stuff is swell. Send us some more." I did not know what "old man Titus" would think about these stories, but I was determined that they were going to be published—if necessary, I would start a magazine of my own!

Mr. Titus proved, if anything, even harder to convince than I had anticipated. I ought not to have been surprised, for his tastes ran rather to Ludwig Lewisohn and Michael Arlen, and he was especially fond of "names," which were about the only thing that would lead him to violate his personal preferences. "This is rot!" was his first reaction. "Why! This fellow can't even write." The fight was on and it lasted a couple of weeks. In the meanwhile, by every boat, there arrived a fresh batch of stories; I had never seen such an output and with the quality standing up so well to the quantity. "For God's sake, tell that chap out in Chicago to stop sending us his tripe!" Nevertheless, I did get Farrell into *This Quarter*, which, he afterward told me, was practically his first appearance in print. (Jolas, I believe, had rejected him for *transition*.)

That might have ended the matter, but it didn't. One day, a month or so later, I met my wife by appointment down near the place de l'Opéra. With her were a rather short young man with bushy hair and spectacles and an Irish face, and a wholesome-appearing young woman with red hair.

"This is Jimmy and Dorothy Farrell. I ran into them in the boulevard des Italiens. They just came in at the gare Saint-Lazare and were trying to find their way to Montparnasse."

I was surprised, but not too surprised; for it was by no means uncommon for Americans from the most unlikely places sud-

denly to get the Left Bank fever, throw their things in a bag, and head for New York and the next boat over. And many of them would arrive all but penniless. I could only hope this was not the case with the Farrels. It was. I do not know what they expected to live on, but if it was Jimmy's earnings from *This Quarter*, they had made a grave miscalculation. The magazine paid but little and at its leisure.

The Farrels, however, managed to hang on for some little while; just how, I do not believe they themselves could have told you. Lodged in a barren *chambre meublée*, they lived out of tins and on coffee and rolls while Jimmy was making up his mind—it did not take him long—that Montparnasse was not for him. He was not in any sense a Montparnasse type. He felt ill at ease with us and we with him. We did not speak the same language. Our own *café* small talk was of Joyce and Stein and *transition* and the "Revolution of the Word," whereas what he brought with him was a new America that was coming up, one we did not know existed, an America that was shortly to find expression in the social-literary movement of the 1930's.

Farrell and his kind were the stay-at-home pluggers who, refusing "exile," had chosen to slug it out with the native scene. As one American newspaper man in Paris said of Studs Lonigan's creator: "He's an exponent of stockyards realism, hard-boiled as hell." Hard-boiled, yes; but not in the Hemingway tradition, whatever the superficial resemblances to that school. There was in Farrell a tenderness that was not that of a Hemingway in his tenderest moments—not even the Hemingway who wrote "Hills Like White Elephants." A tenderness and a hope.

Jimmy himself was one of the most humanly sympathetic persons I have ever known. I have never known anyone with a deeper feeling for the outcasts of life, or who was capable of being more unobtrusively helpful to them when he could be. I have always had to smile when I have heard it said that

he has a hardness if not a contempt for the types that he portrays and for the plain people of earth. I had a chance, in Paris, to see that this was not true, and at a time when he himself needed material help. For he did need it badly before he left. When his wife gave birth to a child in the American Hospital, a child that lived but a few days, he found himself without even the money to pay for having it cremated. I am violating no confidence in telling this, for he has put it all into a well-known short story: "Honey, We'll Be Brave."

Farrell's Paris experience was a tragic one, but it was not the deeper tragedy of disintegration exemplified by Hart Crane and so many others. Rather, it was the beginning for Farrell. Shortly after his return to the States, Vanguard Press brought out the first of the *Studs Lonigan* novels. A little more than a decade later the trilogy was to be looked upon as a modern classic.

Even before he left France, brief as was his stay there, Farrell had laid the basis of a Continental reputation. *Young Lonigan* not long afterward appeared in French translation; and writing of this work, the distinguished critic, Ramon Fernandez, observed that "Nothing could be more 'pure' than this novel, if by purity one means at once freshness and a clear-seeing eye. The author's stroke has to be heavy at moments to show how delicate it is. We are especially pleased to find such a novel as this coming out of America, as an antidote to the pessimism, somewhat too black and somewhat too bald, which for some while past we have come to look for from that quarter. This is not to say that any compromise is thereby made with life's essential wretchedness."

Farrell, as I have said, was with Homer Bevans that night upon my return to America when I ran into the latter on the edge of the Village. At that moment I was very much upset over the fact that the depression had forced me to abandon my little retreat in southern France, where I had expected to dig in for the rest of my life; milk the goats, and devote myself

to study. Mournfully, I produced the photographs of my three-thousand-franc mansion in Mirmande. Homer was sympathetic; he understood; but Jimmy for once was not. I recall the curl of his lips as he said: "I'll take America for mine." I think it was that night that I began to realize how much we "exiles" had to unlearn. Homer was not the only one who sensed a void. We all had had something taken from us. From now on there was to be a persisting gulf between those who went and those who stayed, between those who in the 'twenties had chosen expatriation and the new and younger ones like Farrell who had begun by rejecting it.

In sharp contrast to Farrell was Henry Miller. Like Wam-bly Bald, Henry was more or less an unknown quantity for us when he first arrived in Montparnasse. We knew that he was a proofreader on the Paris edition of the *Chicago Tribune*, that was about all. By reason of his hours, we saw him chiefly late at night or early in the morning. He would come in after the paper had gone to press and would invariably contrive to make an entrance of it, a broad ingenuous grin on his face and a somewhat timid twinkle behind his spectacles—spectacles which, so it was said, he was forever leaving behind him on the banks of the Seine, where for the sake of Hugo-esque color he frequently spent the night with the Parisian lower depths. We also came to know him from the vinous-streaked dawn at the Coupole; and here, when he felt that he had a properly appreciative audience, he would expound his *Weltanschauung*, principally in words of four letters. Briefly stated, it was to the effect that prostitutes are about the only pure beings to be found in a world of reeking garbage. Not a highly original conception; but provided his listeners had had a sufficient number of pernods, he could lend it all the force of novelty. Once in a while, when the alcoholic fumes began to evaporate, someone would emerge from his trance and mutter:

"For Christ's sake, Hank, why don't you write a book? It

ought to be a goddamned classic, or maybe even a best-seller."

To most of us, to all save a few intimates, Miller was not even a "type," but merely someone on the edge of things. Very few suspected that he was interested in writing, much less that he himself wrote. I gave him his first publication, with his "Mademoiselle Claude" story, in the third issue of the *New Review*. I published this contribution because I liked it as a piece of prose, but especially, because I felt that it was a good expression of Montparnasse life in that era and of a prevalent type of expatriate—the Henry Miller type. If Miller was atypical in any way, it was, perhaps, in the greater amount of interest, or more intelligent interest, that he exhibited in at least a certain phase of French life and in certain aspects of contemporary French writing. He associated more with the natives of the country than many Americans did, even though his interest appeared to be confined largely to prostitutes and other representatives of the demimonde. And he had heard of the Surrealists and was later to read, at my suggestion, Louis Ferdinand Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night*, the author and the book that may be said to have made him what he is today. (How well he understood Céline, I have never been able to decide.)

There were, to be sure, other Americans who had a predilection for the *filles de joie*; the difference was that out of this milieu Henry was gradually to evolve a philosophy of life, if it may be called that, certainly an outlook on the world. There were, as I see it, two things that tended to crystallize the process for him: one was the company and influence of Alfred Perles; the other was Céline. First Perles and then Céline showed him how he might erect a literary point of view out of the life that he loved and lived, and thereby provided him with a stock in trade. Henry had made the discovery that Gauguin did that morning when the latter awoke to exclaim "*Merde! Merde!* All is *merde!*" This point of view may be seen in an early stage of formulation in "Made-

"moiselle Claude" and in a later, more developed one in the *Tropic of Cancer*. In the interim, Miller had read his Céline.

I have spoken of Alfred Perles, who was Miller's inseparable shadow; or was it the other way around? Perles's name is now well known in England and America to readers of the very precious advance-guard publications, and even then he had his Montparnasse-blown legend. A part of it he once related to me, himself, when the mood was on him. A lieutenant, I believe it was, in the Austrian Army in the First World War, he was lying in wait for the enemy with his men. When the moment came, he was supposed to rise and give the signal to charge; but instead, he simply lay there, mentally paralyzed, unable to move. The result was that a non-com had to take over and Perles was later court-martialed and saved only through the influence of his family. Such is the tale as he told it; it may be true or it may be apocryphal; he may have had another to tell the next time, to someone else. I should like to believe it, for it would explain Alfred rather neatly, and it might help to explain Henry Miller as well.

Like Miller, Perles was an expounder of the Philosophy of Universal Filth; but unlike his friend, he had a wide European culture to draw upon, an equal facility of expression in three languages, and, what is more to the point, a certain sense of futile automatism that was the unmistakable mark and heritage of the young after-war generation. That he had a very great and direct influence upon Miller's thinking, no one who knew the pair could doubt.

I was back in America on a flying visit in the summer of 1931 when the number of the *New Review* with Miller's story appeared. At his request, I took a copy around to some of the publishers. I shall not forget the hauteur with which one young literary editor informed me: "I don't believe we care to publish Mr. Miller." Another said: "Whorehouse stuff." Another: "Plain pornography." Yet ten years later I was to pick up a literary review and find an article extolling

Henry Miller as one of the great and neglected writers of our time, and the article was signed by the same individual who had been so haughty about "Mademoiselle Claude." Something had happened. It was not merely that Miller had matured his point of view and his style; that point of view had come to suit the temper of the times in those days of the great disillusionment, the later 'thirties; it suited the reaction that had set in against the mid-decade rush for the "proletarian" band-wagon.

We naturally were not aware that Henry was destined to become a writer who within a dozen years or so would be mentioned by the undergraduate in the same breath with Joyce, and who would even take it upon himself to try to dethrone the author of *Ulysses*. It is the old case of I knew him when. To us he was a good drinking companion, a nice guy to run into at Jimmy's or the Coupole or in those desolate shivering hours at the Dôme as we watched the dawn come creeping down the boulevard du Montparnasse to awaken M. Potin's grocer boys across the way and send the "artists" home to bed. We found him humorous, affable, generous, somewhat reserved with those who did not know him well, and with a certain timidity behind it all.

There was a rumor that once upon a time, back in America, Henry had gone around with a copy of Karl Marx under his arm; but there was certainly nothing to show it now. His later writings indicate that he does not know the difference between a *proléttaire* and a *lumpen-proléttaire*. One of his pet aversions in those days—his and Perles's—was Jimmy Farrell. That, in looking back, is not hard to understand. With opposing views of life, Farrell and Miller represented the two diverging paths which the more significant American writing of the turbulent depression-ridden 'thirties was to take. Meanwhile, whatever may be said of Miller, he has summed up for us as no one else has the expatriates' Paris of the second phase: and I think it may be said that the *Tropic of Cancer* is to

that phase what *The Sun Also Rises* is to the preceding one.

Such the Montparnasse we knew: a weird little land crowded with artists, alcoholics, prostitutes, pimps, poseurs, college boys, tourists, society slummers, spendthrifts, beggars, homosexuals, drug addicts, nymphomaniacs, sadists, masochists, thieves, gamblers, confidence men, mystics, fakers, paranoiacs, political refugees, anarchists, "Dukes" and "Countesses," men and women without a country; a land filled with a gaiety sometimes real and often feigned, filled with sorrow, suffering, poverty, frustration, bitterness, tragedy, suicide. Not only was there never any place like it; Montparnasse itself had never been before and never will be again what it was in the 1920's. For it was essentially a part of the first *après-guerre*, and from 1929 on it began dying.

There was one event that foreshadowed the end, had we seen it for what it was. It occurred on the evening of August 23, 1927. We were living in Suresnes at the time, and, having put the baby to bed, my wife and I had gone down to the little river-front café that we frequented, for our coffee and liqueur. We found the place packed that night with workingmen whose eyes glared at us from all corners of the room. Not alone their eyes but their gestures as well were menacing. Riva and I had just remarked it when the proprietor, who knew us well, came up.

"If Monsieur-Madame will pardon me," he said, "I would suggest that they go. It is dangerous. You see, you are Americans, and—well, they do not like Americans—tonight."

We thought it strange; but as there was a stir at the near-by tables and, as I fancied, a movement in our direction, we decided to leave without asking any further questions.

"Well," I remarked, "I don't understand it, I'm sure; but seeing that we're out and this is the only decent place in Suresnes, why not go on in to Paris—how about the Dôme? We haven't been there for a long while."

Coming down along the boulevard Raspail on the bus,

we noticed signs of tumult as we neared the carrefour Vavin. There was a large crowd milling about in the square, and we could see residents of the Quarter, many of whom we recognized, running in all directions. As we alighted in front of the Rotonde and glanced down the boulevard du Montparnasse, we saw what was happening. We saw, but we did not understand. The café terraces were in turmoil; they were being invaded by men dressed like laborers, tables were being overturned, chairs were being hurled, there was a crash of china and glassware, and customers male and female were being tossed into the street. Someone ran past and shouted: "Get out! Get out of here, quick!" We acted on this advice.

"What's it all about?" we wondered. First our experience at Suresnes, now this. Back in the place de l'Opéra once more, I decided to buy a paper and find out if I could. As I came up to the kiosk, my eye caught the headline:

SACCO AND VANZETTI EXECUTED!

The Parisian workers were having their revenge.

V

*From a Latin Quarter Sketchbook*I. THE "DEAN OF ENGLISH NOVELISTS"
(FORD MADOX FORD)

AT THE time I came upon the scene Ford Madox Ford, as has been stated, was very much in the picture. Americans, particularly the Midwesterners, looked upon him as being, if not exactly one of their own, at any rate their advocate in the broader world of letters; and this despite the fact that he had the accent and all the mannerisms of an upper-class Englishman, complete with snort, sniffle, and gasping stutter.

Just why Ford should have become so enamored of America, and especially of our corn belt, is something that may be left to a more intimate biographer to explain. Possibly it was due to the Americans he had come to know in the war, possibly to that lecture tour of the States which, along with so many other literary lights from London and Dublin, he had made in the early 'twenties. It may have been the influence of Aldington and the Imagists, who had already discovered Harriet Monroe and *Poetry* in the far wilderness of Chicago; or it may have been, simply, the insufferable dullness of most of his British contemporaries—for that he did find them "a bit dull," he once confessed to me. Whatever the explanation, he was to grow more and more fond of America and Americans, and was eventually, in the troubled 'thirties, to take up his residence with us. It was American vitality that seemed to attract him, American hard-boiledness of the Hemingway variety, and this he found in the Midwest rather than in

the East. As he put it in the title of one of his books, *New York Is Not America*.

It is not strange, therefore, if the *Transatlantic Review*, which Ford founded and edited in Paris, had a decided mid-American tinge. If the *Transatlantic* had done nothing else, it would have been assured of a place in literary history through its discovery and first publication of Ernest Hemingway.

A fine novelist himself, even if not a great one, Ford had come to be essentially a literary figure, a personality, one who was respected for his critical sense and integrity and for the part he had played in shaping the destinies of more than one of the great moderns—D. H. Lawrence, to mention but a single instance. This naturally gave him a fascinating fund of memories on which to draw. Draw upon them he did, to such an extent that he was sometimes laughingly known as “the great Reminiscer.” Toward the end of his life he devoted more and more attention to his reminiscences and one autobiographical volume followed another; but they were good reading, for Ford had something to tell and knew how to tell it, and he had a right to be proud of the role he had played.

My acquaintance with him dates from those days when I was meeting the Twentieth Century Limited in Chicago and visiting Britishers were coming over in droves. The first interview took place on that same bench in the Blackstone Hotel lobby where not long before I had sat and talked to G. K. Chesterton. I could not help contrasting the two. There was an initial and striking resemblance in their “corporations,” but that was as far as it went. Where Chesterton had a placidity that nothing could rumple and would have been perfectly at home seated before a tankard in a Dutch genre taproom, Ford, notwithstanding his stomach, had a certain slim nervousness about him that was possibly due to his soldiering. Where Chesterton had sat like a life-sized Buddha, the author of *The Good Soldier* fidgeted constantly for something he

never seemed able to find. And there was that ever recurring snort of his, which to me always suggested a cavalry charge.

Some years before, in the pages of Margaret Anderson's *Little Review*, Ford, then Ford Madox Hueffer, had been guilty of a slight indiscretion (or so it appeared, to hear him now), when he had written that "the only two pursuits worthy of a gentleman are war and poetry." Having exhausted the required topics of bobbed hair, prohibition, the American flapper, and what-do-you-think-of-prohibition, I decided to bring up the subject of the war by reminding him of his previously expressed views. Mr. Ford snorted—at Mr. Hueffer.

"I think," he said, "we may leave out the war."

As the talk turned to literature and Mr. Ford's contemporaries, he was careful to make one thing clear: "When George Moore dies, I believe I shall be the dean of English novelists." I was to hear him repeat this remark a good many times during the next few years; for, I discovered, it meant something very definite to him: it was the thing that placed him, by which he wished to be placed, in the eyes of the younger generation. And he did become the "dean," in 1933.

That same evening, in the Arts Club of Chicago, Mr. Ford gave a talk, a reminiscent one. At a certain point he paused and an ominous hush fell as the speaker drew himself soldierly erect, threw his shoulders back—stiff enough for a colonel at the very least—and took a deep breath.

"And now," he said, "and now we come to the, to me"—three snorts in rapid succession—"somewhat unpleasant figure of Oscar Wilde." The last words were gasped out, almost in a single breath. I do not recall just what it was he had to tell us about Oscar, but it could not have been so very dreadful after all, for none of the Gold Coast ladies present were in the least perturbed by it.

Later during his stay I had a chance for a real talk or two, and it was then I learned how very much concerned he was with our young expatriates, our "*déracinés*," in Paris. He

was enthusiastic over Hemingway and insisted on being driven out to see the staid, ultrarespectable suburb of Oak Park which had produced such a phenomenon. He must also see the stockyards, which caused him to sniff more than ever, but he disdained the new boulevard-link, then in the building, of which Chicago was so proud. "I can see all the boulevards that I wish to see in Europe," was his comment. What he wanted was the "feel" of the place from which, as he saw it, the new literature was coming.

A short while after our arrival in Paris, Riva and I were wheeling the baby down the rue de Vaugirard, when whom should we, literally, bump into but Mr. Ford—we had forgotten that he lived at No. 32. He was more surprised than we; for the last time he had seen me was in Llewellyn Jones's apartment in Chicago and I had said nothing then of my intention of coming abroad. Upon learning that we were headed across the Luxembourg, toward the Dôme, he gallantly insisted upon pushing the baby's perambulator, discoursing all the while—I cannot say how it started—on Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. I do recall that it was one of the most interesting expositions of the subject I had heard or read; for he had an indubitable gift for bringing to life any sector of the literary past that, in the course of his long years, he had chanced to touch.

Upon learning that I was giving up newspaper work, at least for the time being, he expressed his satisfaction, and then he went on to explain: "The difference is that a journalist has to write *in* his environment, whereas the writer can only write *outside* of his." The next day I received a note from him in which he said: "I am pleased and not astonished that you have decided to settle here"; and with characteristic thoughtfulness he proceeded to make suggestions as to how I might add to my income.

We soon formed the habit of looking in at Stella Bowen's studio at teatime, where Ford was always the center of attrac-

tion. It was there that we first saw Stella's revealing portrait of him, a reproduction of which was published in the *New Review*: the one that shows him over a game of solitaire, gazing up abstractedly with his mouth drooping open. It was an extremely characteristic pose; Ford looked exactly like that when trying to marshal his thoughts before speaking.

It was after he and Stella had separated that, in his new "bachelor" apartment down near the Sorbonne, Ford started his Thursday afternoons, which were to become quite famous in the Quarter. The attendance was rather overwhelmingly feminine, with only the more serious ones among the other sex or an occasional old acquaintance like Pound, Aldington, or F. S. Flint putting in an appearance. As for the young women—the "Ladies Whose Bright Eyes" as we named them—it is to be suspected that nearly every other one had a novel or a short story, possibly concealed upon her person, which she hoped that the Dean of English Novelists would "look at"; for Ford at that time was on a veritable spree of preface-and blurb-writing, and, as it seemed to happen, most of his discoveries were women.

It is not to be assumed from this that he let chivalry interfere with his critical judgment; as a matter of fact, he did not. I have never known a man of letters who was more genuinely eager to be helpful to newcomers with any promise whatsoever, or who had more of a passion for literature as a great and fine art and was more desirous of furthering it through the uncovering of new talent; but this does not mean that he let down his standards for the sake of friendship or merely to please.

However, the impression had got around that Ford was particularly interested in women writers, and as a result the latter flocked to his afternoons. I believe they were attracted, for one thing, by his paternal air, and this was a role that he loved to play. As the ladies sat on the divan and smiled up worshipfully, he would mince up and down the floor with a

gait that slightly resembled that of an overgrown duckling, would show his teeth through his mustache in a restrained fatherly smile or would give an equally restrained chuckle, and would thereupon proceed to drop bright little bits of elderly, reminiscent wisdom. At such times I could not help being reminded of a hen digging up a woolly worm in the garden and chortling over it by way of summoning her brood. Mr. Ford's remarks were gobbled up quite as avidly by the audience upon the divan.

These afternoons were nothing if not decorous affairs. Tea was served. Tea and conversation. Never a vulgar un-Continental-like cocktail. For, while Ford ran heavily to Americans, his guests being by preference almost exclusively of that nationality, he was decidedly Continental and un-American in the matter of food and drink. He was something of a gourmet, or liked to give that impression. I remember his snort at a restaurant luncheon one day when Ezra Pound, out of politeness, inquired if anyone wished a liqueur. "At luncheon—I should hope not!" And no one took a liqueur. He once gave me a lecture about the proper drinks with which to end a large evening: something about not mixing corn and grape products. "If you have been drinking champagne, a brandy is the thing; after whisky you may take beer." Elementary, perhaps, but helpful if you chose to heed it. But at his parties there was no *apéritif* of any sort, not even a glass of port; he remained an Englishman in his fondness for tea at the fitting hour.

Ford liked to keep these occasions in a certain key and was exceedingly annoyed by anything that disturbed the prearranged harmony. He did not appear to be overly fond, even, of having old friends like Pound drop in, for they were distracting; and there can be no doubt that he liked to occupy the center of the stage himself in this, his own little domain. I never saw him more angry than he was with Flint one afternoon.

The latter, whose name is all but forgotten today, at least in America, was one of the British Imagists who had come up in the teens of the century. A fine poet and critic, he earned his living as an attaché and linguistic expert of the League of Nations at Geneva, and it was in Geneva that I first met him. Aldington had given him a note to me, introducing him as a "poet-statistician," and he had done much to relieve the monotony and the Calvinistic horrors of the city by Lake Leman. Slight of build, Flint really ought to have had a Rabelaisian paunch, for he was always throwing his head back in a hearty laugh and his manner was frequently riotous. The only time I ever saw him wholly serious was when he spoke of "the unbelievably low level of taste in England."

This afternoon at Ford's he had arrived in high spirits; for, aware that only tea would be served, he had had his *apéritif*—or *-tives*—before he came. His entrance was like a gust of wind. From the start he seemed vastly amused with everybody and everything, and this in itself was distasteful to his host, who kept pacing up and down, chewing his mustache, sniffing, and all but choking. To make matters worse, Flint insisted upon speaking French, and an exquisite French it was. This made Ford especially irate, for the French spoken by most of those present was something wonderful to hear. At last he could stand it no longer and burst out:

"For God's sake, Flint, remember that you are an Englishman and a gentleman!"

Having had his sport, Mr. Flint took his mocking departure not long afterward, and as the door closed behind him, Ford heaved a sigh. "I'm sure I don't know," he commented, "why it is that Flint always insists on speaking French when he's—er—" sniff—"when he's—" For there were some things that simply were not mentioned.

Then there were those sonnet-writing contests, held on a Saturday night. Allen Tate and his wife were close friends of Ford, and Mr. Tate was a kind of major-domo on these occa-

sions. Subjects were handed out and a certain length of time was given in which to complete a sonnet, after which the respective efforts were compared and judged and prizes were awarded. It was all very exciting if you cared for that sort of thing, and, contrasted with what commonly passed as amusement in the Quarter, it was innocent enough. The terraces found it quite funny. The truth is, I suspect, that these were simply the genial pastimes of a lonely old man and that there were some who abetted him in them because they respected and were fond of him, while others had a canny eye to what his acquaintance might procure them.

Ford was very lonely, that was plain to be seen. Especially at night. He never came near the Dôme, but would stroll down to the Deux-Magots and sit at a table waiting for an audience of one or two. Most often it was Arabella Yorke, whom I had first met at Richard Aldington's place down in the country near London, and her mother, Mrs. Selina Yorke, now in her seventies but earning her living still as fashion editor of the Paris *New York Herald*. With them Ford would sit for hours and reminisce. Others might come and be invited to drop down, it made little difference; all that was needed was a pair of listening ears, and Ford the fictionist was at his best. Unquestionably a born story-teller, he carried his fictionizing over into real life; or perhaps one should say that for him the demarcating wall between fiction and what ordinary mortals know as the truth simply melted away.

He is talking now of his war experiences.

"I remember," he is saying. "It was in No Man's Land. We were making a night attack. I had gone ahead to reconnoiter. I was crawling along on my—er—stomach when suddenly, above the roar of battle, I heard a sound—it was larks singing. Then I looked up and saw that it was light as day. From the bursting shells, y'know. The larks had seen the light and thought it was morning."

When I reported this anecdote to Aldington, Richard bel-

lowed. "Just imagine!" he exclaimed. "Just imagine Ford crawling anywhere on that stomach of his!"

Ford was apt to apply his fictionizing to the most inconsequential details of life, as when he informed me that the plain little four-room apartment he occupied after he and Stella Bowen had separated had formerly belonged to a favorite professor of his at the Sorbonne and that he had taken it for old sake's sake. I afterward learned that he had never been at the Sorbonne, just as I learned that his wartime duties had been largely confined to the liaison service in Paris. It was traits such as these that endeared him to us.

There was one tale he told that happened to be true, of the time when, at a French literary banquet, he had challenged André Gide to a duel over something uncomplimentary which Gide had said of Conrad. All Paris laughed over it for a number of days.

My final impression of Mr. Ford is from the Riviera. I was a guest at Willy Seabrook's and Marjorie Worthington's villa, which was on one side of Sanary in the Var while the Fords (he had married again by this time) lived on the other side. Ford had a secretary, a young Greenwich Village novelist as yet unpublished, by the name of Richard Murphy; and when his employer went away on Sunday, Murphy used to come over to spend the day with us. He always had to be back by dusk, however, in order to feed the chickens, for that was a sizable part of his secretarial functions. One day, so he told us, he had undertaken to explain to Mr. Ford the phenomenon of Oscar Wilde.

"I don't care to hear about it"—and the matter was brushed aside. "I know that such things are rumored, but I am sure that they do not exist!"

There was also an attempt at an initiation into Ronald Firbank, but this likewise failed to take.

At last, one day, Ford asked his secretary to climb a certain tree and find out whether or not the figs were ripe.

"In the first place," began Mr. Murphy, "I can't climb trees; and in the second place, I shouldn't know a ripe fig if I saw one."

"You wouldn't know a ripe fig!" the Dean of English Novelists all but sputtered. "Well, I—er—I—simply can't have a secretary who doesn't know ripe figs!"

2. HARD-BOILED YOUNG MAN GOING PLACES (ERNEST HEMINGWAY)

As in the case of Ford, my first meeting with Ernest Hemingway did not take place on the Left Bank but in Chicago, and, curiously enough, in North Wells Street, up several flights in a ramshackle old building where a certain interminable and indescribably tedious but, so it appeared, very important bankruptcy hearing was in progress, if progress is the word. I was covering the case for my paper, and among the other reporters present was a mild-mannered, inconspicuous young chap who came up and introduced himself as Hemingway and who stated that he represented the *Toronto Star*.

This was in the early 'twenties. The author of *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms* was as yet practically unheard of in the literary world; he had had some poems published in Miss Monroe's magazine, that was about all. However (although I was unaware of it at the time), he had already garnered, as an ambulance driver on the Italian front in the First World War, those experiences of which he was to make so much use as a writer. I was not particularly impressed one way or another.

The next time I saw Hemingway was shortly after *The Sun Also Rises* had appeared. He was now well on the road to being a famous author and in the process had succeeded in conferring, also, a dubious fame upon the American expatriate colony of Montparnasse. As we sat over our drinks at the

Deux-Magots it did not take me long to discover that the somewhat shy and youthful reporter whom I had met in Chicago had vanished and that in his place was a literary celebrity. It was not that he was in the least pompous or conceited; I cannot conceive of that with Hemingway, ever. He was, rather, the exuberant young man who has made a fine start and is agreeably conscious and proud of the fact; you could not help liking him for it. He gave you the impression of a certain tense seriousness with regard to the writer's trade; it was as if he was determined not to spoil his start and to work like hell, as he put it, to see that this did not happen. In typical Hemingway language and with all the Hemingway nonchalance, he proceeded to deliver to a highly appreciative audience of one a brief, informal, but extremely revealing lecture on the art of writing.

Work—that was the thing he stressed most of all: the writer must work—and work and work—at his job. Apothegms dropped from his lips as from those of a brilliant sophomore doing his best not to appear too brilliant, even to the extent of resorting to a copybook triteness. "Easy writing makes hard reading." That was one of the things he said which I have always remembered. He said it a number of times.

"The first and most important thing of all, at least for writers today, is to strip language clean, to lay it bare down to the bone, and that takes work."

Has he been influenced in this respect by Gertrude Stein? He admitted that he had learned something from her, but was not too enthusiastic. Similarly, as to Ezra Pound he was rather pleasantly, and youthfully, patronizing. Then, with charming simplicity and without being "interviewed," he went on to speak of his "influences." Chief among these, he assured me, was the Old Testament in the King James version. "That's how I learned to write," he said, "by reading the Bible." The subject of the new Goodspeed version, then in course of publication by the University of Chicago Press, came up. Heming-

way was almost violent in his reaction to the idea of modernizing the Biblical text. It would, he asserted, deprive us of "one of the few real pieces of literature that we have." I asked if he would put Shakespeare alongside the Bible as a model for writers.

"Yes, Shakespeare—but above all, the Old Testament. That's all any writer needs."

How had he come to write *The Sun Also Rises*?

"Oh, I don't know. I was just knocking around with the bunch and I tried to put it down. If you're a writer, you write; and if you're a good writer, you write about things you know."

Would he say, as some of the critics were saying, that his novel was an expression of postwar disillusionment?

"The war played hell with a lot of us."

"The 'Lost Generation'?" I suggested.

"Don't take what Gertie says too seriously," he advised. "How the hell are you going to be lost when you've never been found?"

"What do you try to do in writing, anyway?"

"Put down what I see and what I feel in the best and simplest way I can tell it."

If I quote Hemingway with so much assurance, it is because I went home that night and tried to jot down what he had said as nearly as I could remember it. Ordinarily, I do not have the instincts of a Boswell, but I had a feeling that in this case I might want a record; and only the other day I came across the yellowing old *cahier* containing these notes.

So much for the literary side. This, after all, proved to be the minor part of the conversation, or of Hemingway's monologue, perhaps I should say. He talked of hunting and fishing and drinking. Especially of drinking, which he regarded, apparently, as something of a big-game exploit. Here, sitting opposite me now, was the creator of that character who had uttered the famous dictum about the bottle as "a sovereign

means of direct action." He sat there, talking on and on, and brilliantly, of flying, skiing, boxing, bull-fighting. The "three most exciting things in life," he gravely informed me, were flying, skiing, and sexual intercourse. Only, he did not say sexual intercourse but used the short and not unlovely word.

Here was one writer who could talk as well as write, and very much as he wrote. Or was it that he wrote as he talked, especially in a work like *The Sun Also Rises*? He was so effective an oral narrator, without any of the usual more or less self-conscious attributes of the "good conversationalist," that one was quite content to surrender and drift as one does with the stream of his prose, which, like all prose at its best, has something of the effect of an enchantment, an incantation, of a primitive and rhythmic magic.

The result was that, in listening to Hemingway as in reading him, I did not give a thought to the nature of his themes —it is only afterward that one does that. Most of these subjects had never held any interest for me. Were they not the common avocations of the Babbitt, big or small, of the Rotarians, the Chamber of Commerce, the millionaire Explorers' Club, the Blue Book sportsman? How would they appear under the heavy touch of Sinclair Lewis? Yet this young man in front of me, from the suburb of Oak Park which I knew so well, was obviously bent upon taking these things and making literature of them. They happened to be his world, and it was *his* world that he was writing about; just as Edith Wharton had made literature out of the narrow little set in which she moved, or as Proust had done, from his cork-lined room, out of the memories of a salon of the *ancien régime* and the decadent coterie that frequented it.

Hemingway, I reflected, *had* learned something from Stein: something about what Stein calls "the rhythm of the visible universe."

On this particular day he was quite excited over a boxing match which he had just staged with Morley Callaghan, who

was passing through Paris. He told me about it with great enthusiasm as we walked over to his place at 69 rue Froidevaux, a few squares from Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Callaghan, it seemed, had defeated him in a set of tennis and he had had to have his revenge. They accordingly had put on the gloves in the basement of Hemingway's house, and Ernest, by his own account, had "knocked hell out of" his opponent. He appealed to Mrs. Hemingway to corroborate this, and it seemed to me that she treated him somewhat as one might a bright and lovable child. But it was plain that for him this was another of life's important exploits.

I did not see much of him during the years that followed. None of us did around Paris. Only at rare intervals would we pick up his trail through the Quarter when he was there upon a visit. Contrary to what may be the popular impression, he was not an habitué of the cafés. He was one of those who could live in Paris, in Montparnasse even, and still get some work done. In the introduction which he wrote for my translation of Kiki's *Memoirs*, speaking of the "Montparnasse era"—the end of which he dates from the appearance of breakfast foods at the Dôme and the elevation of Kiki into a "monumental" legend—he goes on to set forth his own attitude toward the Bohemian life in a few sentences that deserve to be reprinted:

Montparnasse for this purpose means the cafés and restaurants where people are seen in public. It does not mean the apartments, studios and hotel rooms where they work in private. In the old days the difference between the workers and those that didn't work was that the bums could be seen at the cafés in the forenoons. This of course was not entirely true as the greatest bums, using the word in the American rather than in the English connotation, did not rise until about five o'clock when, on entering the cafés, they would drink in friendly competition with the workers who had just knocked off work for the day. The worker goes to the café with the lonesomeness that a writer or painter has after he has worked all day and does not want to think about it until the

next day but instead see people and talk about everything that is not serious and drink a little before supper. And maybe during and after supper, too, depending upon the individual. . . . The Era is over. It passed along with the kidneys of the workers who drank too long with the bums. The bums were fine people and proved to have the stronger kidneys finally. But then they rested during the day. Still that Era is over.

Although I did not see much of Hemingway personally, I did have contact with him by correspondence now and then. No successful writer was ever less pretentious or more cordial toward others engaged in or associated with the craft. He was helpful to me both in my editing of the *New Review* and in rounding up material for my *European Caravan*. And on one occasion I got him and myself into rather a nasty mess. It is an incident that is admirably illustrative of the mentality of fascist "intellectuals."

At that time I was very much interested, as I have been for a good many years, in Italy, the Italian people, and the language and literature of the peninsula—I had not yet made the discovery that literature under fascism had ceased to exist. I had contracted with Amy Loveman to do an "Italian Letter" for the *Saturday Review of Literature*; and in my own magazine I gave prominence to Italian as to French, Spanish, German, and other Continental writers. It occurred to me that a good way to bring about a better rapprochement between Italy and America might be to set up a jury to pick the three best books of the year from each country; and for the American judges I invited Hemingway, Faulkner, Mencken, Harry Hansen, and a number of others, to serve. Then the storm broke—among the fascist literati.

To understand what happened, it is necessary to recall the reception accorded in Italy to *A Farewell to Arms*. Both the book and the film were suppressed, being looked upon as an insult to the Italian people, by which was meant the Mussolini regime. Hemingway, it appeared, had given an unflattering

account of the retreat from Pavia and, in general, of Italy's role in the war. As a matter of fact, that retreat was notorious among Italians themselves, and *A Farewell to Arms*, by showing that there was at least some fighting on that front, did much to counteract the bad impression that most Americans held. But with the fascists it is always all or nothing: everything must be perfect in their domain.

There followed a great to-do in the peninsular press. The *Giornale d'Italia* of Genoa devoted a column to extracts from Hemingway's writings as proof that he was an enemy, including one in which a traffic officer (a fascist) pockets a twenty-five-lire bribe which he has extorted from a motorist—as if this could not happen in any country in the world. At once I was flooded with letters and wires from all over Italy, and especially from the Italian correspondents of my magazine who, fearful of the consequences to themselves, pleaded with me to get them out of their plight. There was obviously nothing for me to do but call the thing off and wash my hands of the entire affair. In my letter to the Italians, I pointed out that the author of *A Farewell to Arms* was a representative, highly popular, and important young American novelist and that he had been asked to pass not upon Italian but upon American works. I further stated that he was a personal friend whose artistic sincerity I had always admired.

Hemingway, I must say, was extremely forbearing about all this; and it would have been the end of the episode as far as I myself was concerned if my Italian friends, as I called them then, had been content to let matters rest. But they were not. As usual under fascism, their enemies had taken advantage of a false move on their part and had come down upon them, and it was up to them to clear themselves. They did so by publishing my letter, which would have been all right if they had published it as it stood; but they saw fit to "edit" it by writing in an abject apology which made me out to be an errant but repentant fascist sympathizer. This letter ap-

peared in the newspapers of Genoa, Rome, and other cities, and nothing that I could do would procure a retraction or correction. I then laid the facts before Waverley Root, who related in detail, in the Paris edition of the *Chicago Tribune*, all that had occurred.

To this day, it may be added, Hemingway is popular with Italian antifascists and is at the moment enjoying an after-war vogue, his *For Whom the Bell Tolls* being a contemporary best-seller there. Even the Italian Communists like him, and serialized his novel of the Spanish war in their cultural organ.

Meanwhile, it may be of interest to know the titles of the "three best books of the year" that Hemingway picked. They were: *1919* by John Dos Passos; *Conquistador* by Archibald MacLeish; and *The American Jitters* by Edmund Wilson.

"Am no judge of masterpieces," he wrote to me, "but above are three best books I have read during the year. All have faults—all are damned good."

3. THE WOMAN WITH THE FACE LIKE CAESAR'S (GERTRUDE STEIN)

Gertrude Stein lived in the rue de Fleurus, "about ten jumps from the Dôme," as my friend Wambly Bald put it; but the jumps would have had to be powerful ones. So far as her place of abode was concerned, she was not far removed from the roaring center of Montparnasse life; but for most residents of the Quarter she might as well have lived in Timbuktu.

Her topographical situation was typical of her attitude toward the outside world in general. She was remote and yet not remote. The common impression was that, like Joyce, she was a cloistered being, fearful of any intrusion; she was pictured as one who could be approached only with genuflections and the odor of incense; whereas the truth is that, unlike the creator of *Ulysses*, she was quite accessible to her admirers and

to any of the press who chose to look in at her "studio" (there were not many that did in those days).

Miss Stein's acquaintance with Americans at this period seemed to be limited to Bravig Imbs, Elliot Paul, Glenway Wescott, Eugene Jolas and his wife Maria, and one or two others. Paul, upon Jolas's suggestion, had asked her to write for *transition*, and, according to Maria Jolas's statement, she had consented with sufficient alacrity. The magazine proceeded to reprint her *Tender Buttons* and in addition published her *Four Saints* opera and a bibliography of her work. Just what was the cause of the final break between *transition* and Miss Stein, will perhaps never be told in print by those in a position to know; but the rupture was signalized by the publication of the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* on the one hand and, on the other hand, by a blast in answer to this work, published in the form of a pamphlet: *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*, bearing the signatures of the Jolases, Matisse, Braque, André Salmon, and Tristan Tzara.

All this, however, was in the future. At the time of which I am speaking, Stein and Joyce were the two big thrills that *transition* had to offer its transatlantic customers; and pilgrims would come from afar—from as far away as Chicago and California—on the chance of being able to have a word with the author of *Tender Buttons* or the genius who was then engaged in producing the "Work in Progress." It may seem strange, but I think that more of them came to the rue de Fleurus than to Joyce's place, and it is also my impression that there were more women than men among Stein's devotees. What moral there is to this, I am sure I do not know; but if one is to judge from the reports brought back, she appeared to get on better with the women.

There was the case of Annie, the little girl who had read *Geography and Other Plays* and who had journeyed from Chicago to Paris because she simply must discuss the work with the author. Daughter of middle-class parents who had

reared her to believe that her virginity was her jewel, Annie was a very beautiful young woman who, as she put it (for she was inclined to mysticism), "gave off vibrations." Give them off she certainly did; and what is more, she drove all the males nearly crazy as she sat at the Dôme by the hour and weightily pondered the question, seeking the advice of all present: "Should I or should I not lose my virginity?" Annie's first visit to the rue de Fleurus had been a great success and she had become a frequent visitor. One day she came back and announced that the question was settled. Miss Stein had solved the problem for her. The solution? According to Annie, Miss Stein had said:

"To be a virgin is to be a virgin and not to be a virgin is not to be a virgin and not to be a virgin may be to be a virgin."

That, at any rate, was what Annie told us. I cannot vouch for it.

For my own part, I was always afraid of Gertrude. She reminded me a trifle too much of the cigar-smoking Amy Lowell, whom I had known in my younger days. Wambly Bald had named her "the Woman with a Face Like Caesar's," and it seemed to fit.

We were at the Dôme one afternoon when Wambly said: "Come on, let's go up and see Gertie."

"What do you mean? She'd throw us out."

Leo Stein, Gertrude's brother, was sitting with us.

"What are you afraid of?" he asked. "My God, Sam, you have no idea how dumb she is! Why, when we were in school, I used to have to do all her home work for her."

Leo and Gertrude definitely did not care for each other; and this remark, I reflected, must be a bit of an exaggeration in view of his sister's record at Johns Hopkins and at Harvard in such abstruse subjects as brain anatomy and abnormal pathology. But it heartened me, nonetheless. I decided to go with Wambly.

"You do the talking," I said to him. "I'll stay in the background."

"And to think," he observed as we came up to the building in which Miss Stein lived, "and to think that it is from here that she has been saving the English language for the last twenty-five years!"

Inside, we found the walls covered with Picassos. Picasso, Picasso, and more Picasso.

"Yes," Miss Stein informed us, "Picasso has done eighty portraits of me. I sat for that one ninety-one times."

Good newspaperman that he is, Wambly lost no time in coming to the point; and the interviewing technique that he chose to adopt, a belligerent one, proved to be admirably suited to the purpose of drawing out the interviewee. But still, I was mildly alarmed at his beginning.

"Your prose, Miss Stein," he blurted out, "strikes me as being obscure, deliberately obscure."

The Woman with the Face Like Caesar's never looked more like him than then, as she drew herself up haughtily and replied:

"My prose is obscure only to the lazy-minded. It is a well, a deep well, well it is like a well and that is well."

"There are some people," persisted Wambly, "who are inclined to believe that it is a bottomless well—or one with a false bottom."

At this, Miss Stein's eyes flashed like Caesar's on the field of battle and her voice rang as she answered:

"Naturally, I have my detractors. What genius does not?"

"You *are* a genius, then?" It was my first question. Miss Stein looked at me as if I were a dot that had suddenly appeared upon the map.

"There are three of us," she enunciated: "Myself, Picasso, and Whitehead." (She was to repeat this statement in her *Autobiography*.)

"What about Joyce?"

"Joyce," she admitted, "is *good*." (The italics were in her voice.) "He is a *good* writer. People like him because he is incomprehensible and anybody can understand him. But who came first, Gertrude Stein or James Joyce? Do not forget that my first great book, *Three Lives*, was published in 1908. That was long before *Ulysses*. But Joyce *has* done *something*. His influence, however, is local. Like Synge, another Irish writer, he has had his day. Won't you have some more tea?"

"You feel, then, Miss Stein, that your place in literature is secure?"

"My place in literature? Twentieth-century literature *is* Gertrude Stein. There was Henry James, of course—"

"Yes, there was Henry James—"

"He was my precursor, you might say; but everything really begins with my *Three Lives*."

At this point, Wambly saw fit to remind our hostess of something which Wyndham Lewis had just said about her. Lewis had implied that she was in the same class with Anita Loos.

"That," exclaimed Miss Stein, "is simply British propaganda—against great American writers! I am surprised that you pay any attention to it."

"You think that the English are jealous of the Americans?"

"They have a right to be. After all, America made the twentieth century just as England made the nineteenth. America has given Europe everything. America has given Europe Gertrude Stein—"

"What about the other great American writers?"

"There are the big four: Poe, Whitman, James, myself. The line of descent is clear. And James, Whitman, and Poe are dead. I am the last. But I am truly international. My reputation is growing all the time."

"Do you feel that your writing is really American, that is to say, typically American?"

"Certainly. What has been the tendency of American writing?"

Wambly and I exchanged glances, each waiting for the other to speak up.

"Toward abstraction, of course. But an abstraction without mysticism. That is the great contribution of Gertrude Stein. Her work is abstract without being mystical. There is no mysticism in my work."

"No mysticism?"

"None whatever," was the emphatic response. "My work is perfectly natural. It is so natural that it is unnatural to those to whom the unnatural is natural. I reproduce things exactly as they are and that is all there is to it. The outer world becomes the inner world and the inner world becomes the outer, and the outward is no longer outward but inward and the inward is no longer inward but outward and it takes genius to do that and Gertrude Stein *is* a genius. . . .

4. CRACKER-BARREL PHILOSOPHER (EZRA POUND)

In writing of those whom one knew years ago and whose characters as revealed by their actions have in the meantime, to all appearances, undergone a radical change or development, there is always the temptation to a facile and superior hindsight. That is a temptation that I should like to avoid in speaking of Ezra Pound. I should like to present him as I knew him in the 1920's and the early 1930's, without any moralizing animus inspired by the fact that today he stands accused of treason to his country and, if found sane enough at any moment to stand trial, must face a death sentence. In the case of such a man, there is something distasteful about digging up his past and saying, with an air of omniscience: I knew it all the time. It is not only in poor taste but may be a

fallacious procedure as well. As a matter of fact, one did not know it all the time; one never does.

For the simple truth of the matter is: human nature does change, for better or for worse, and the individual either progresses or retrogresses. This does not mean that, in looking back with the knowledge and deepened insight one possesses today, one may not be able to discover certain traits, certain tares or flaws in the man, and, in the case of a writer, in his work, that may have passed with little notice at the time but that have a revealing light to throw upon the individual's subsequent career. Indeed, this is a process that might profitably be applied by students of literature to the writings and, insofar as the facts are available, to the lives of such figures as Pound, Yeats, Hamsun, and Hauptmann. But at the same time, one who has known them personally a quarter of a century ago should be at pains to depict them very much as *he knew them then*, with all their good and charming qualities and without any malice of afterthought—for how readily may malice put on the cloak of moralizing!

Bigot! that buggar is done for. It would be easy to quote these words from Pound's twentieth *Canto*; but to do so would solve nothing. We must beware of burning the book-burners' worthwhile books.

My most vivid personal impression of Ezra will perhaps remain that of his broad-seeming shoulders filling the doorway of my Montparnasse apartment, his Byronic shirt, his fawn-colored beard. Our acquaintance had begun by correspondence some years before, while I was still in Chicago. Like Mencken, Aldington, and others, Pound had been attracted by my battles in print with the local intelligentsia. When the late Keith Preston had attacked Aldington's poems, for example, I had come to the defense of the British Imagist, who had written me a letter of appreciation; and it was some of the things I had said about Miss Monroe's *Poetry* that led Pound to start sending me his "Harriet bitched me" letters.

He had launched his magazine, the *Exile*, from Rapallo, but was having a hard time making a go of it; and so I suggested to him and to Pascal Covici that the latter take over the publication and put it out from Chicago, which was done. From Pound's study in Rapallo to that loft in South Wabash Avenue was quite a span, but this was typical of the kind of thing that was taking place in the Anglo-American literary world of that period.

Since Ezra had already moved on to Italy, I did not meet him in person until some while after my arrival in Paris; but I had had a chance to form all sorts of impressions of him from the comments of his friends and acquaintances. Among those who knew him well I do not believe there was one who was not fully and amusedly aware of his foibles, his vulnerable points, and even his more serious faults; but this did not interfere in the slightest with their appreciation of Pound the poet, whom they respected a good deal more highly than they did Pound the prose writer or Pound the critic—for the critic, frequently, they had no respect at all, especially as regarded his choice of protégés. Thus, Ford, who had a warm personal feeling for Ezra as well as a high opinion of his work, was always snorting at his "asininities" (for Ford never took such matters lightly), and Aldington in a hilarious moment once remarked to me: "Why, Sam, don't you realize that Ezra could no more have a thought than you or I could have a child?"

This last impression was quite a common one, and it could not but be bolstered by Pound's epistolary eruptions and by the increasingly muddled character of his "thinking" as revealed in the form of articles or editorials; the editorial department that he conducted in the *New Review* was possibly the best example of this, a tendency which was to culminate in his *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, his dreary and confused expositions of Major Douglas's Social Credit theory, and, finally, his broadcasts over the fascist radio in Rome. When one read

some of the drivel that he poured forth, one was tempted to take Aldington's witticism literally. It seemed incredible that this was the same writer who had given us the *Cantos* and who was looked upon as one of the outstanding exponents of the cerebral in verse. How reconcile the seeming contradiction?

For the British especially, I think, the difficulty lay in their inability to realize how very American—and Western-American, at that—Pound really was. They were not acquainted with the philosopher of the crossroads grocery and the cracker-barrel, a type that has existed and still exists from Maine to the state of Idaho, where Pound was born. It is a type that, as I know from my own boyhood, is almost invariably "agin the Government" and addicted to "cussing out" things as they are. In politics we have a sublimation of this character in Harold Ickes, the "old curmudgeon." What is hard to grasp is the startling combination that is to be encountered in Ezra of the cracker-barrel philosopher and the fine expatriate poet, with themes and interests that range from Provence to ancient China, from Guido Cavalcanti to the *Ta Hio*.

For with all his broad poetic culture, politically Ezra had remained seated on the cracker-barrel (a metaphor, by the way, of which he himself was fond); commonly regarded as the typical cosmopolitan man of letters, he had retained, in his attitude toward society and the affairs of the world, a provincial small-town outlook. Just how it came about, might require a social psychiatrist to explain; for there were undoubtedly both social and psychological, environmental and possibly hereditary, factors involved. I became acquainted with Pound's father, a retired regular Army officer also living at Rapallo, and the letters from him that I have in my files read very much like those of his son, save for the freakish abbreviated spelling (which Ezra seems to have got from the correspondence of Flaubert). The father was proud of the

son—between the lines you can hear the former chuckling at the latter's loud cussing and you feel that he too must have been an adept at the art.

Whatever the explanation, Pound was to retain and cherish his cracker-barrel attitudes and was to be "agin" more and more things as time went on: the "insolence" of consular attachés and customs officials; the "commercialism" of American publishers under a profit system who declined to lose money on his work and that of his protégés; the "stupidity" of American reviewers, book censors—until finally he was to turn to a Mussolini and, like any reactionary Babbitt, bring forth the argument that Il Duce had at least made the trains run on time! He was to become a perennial vox-popper and an avid reader of the *Congressional Record* (this, back in the 'twenties) and the correspondent of senators who came more and more to reflect his own political outlook.

Back of it all was to be observed a certain willful narrowing of intellectual interests which more and more took on the guise of an unpleasant egotism and arrogance. The literary aspect of this is to be seen in such a work as his *ABC of Reading*, which is little less than an insult to the reader's intelligence. For Pound there were whole vast sectors of world literature that simply did not exist. One of these was the Russian. You will find in his treatise no mention of "them Rooshans," as he always referred to them. Dostoevski, Gogol, Gorky, Chekhov—all the great names of the nineteenth century in the land of the Czars meant nothing to him. Turgenev was the only one whom he would somewhat grudgingly have recognized. It may be that his dislike and, I suspect, fear of the Soviet Union and Marxian communism (though he pretended to flirt with both for a short while) had something to do with this.

In the field of contemporary literature his taste was equally limited. All he could see, practically, was Ezra Pound and a handful of old friends and disciples: among Americans, Zu-

kofsky, McAlmon, William Carlos Williams. As for "Parson Eliot," as he called the author of *The Waste Land*, he would grumble and even sneer at him but would defend him against any attack. In France the only one that mattered, apparently, was Cocteau—with a good word for Aragon, if he happened to think of him.

I had a vivid illustration of this when I consulted Ezra with regard to the writers who should be included in the French section of the *European Caravan*. "Let me have pencil and paper." I handed them to him. Poising the pencil high in the air, with an eloquent sweeping gesture, he frowned intently in a manner to lead me to assume that he was doing some real thinking on the subject. "Let me see—there is Cocteau, of course . . ." He made a note. "There is Cocteau . . ." And, believe it or not, that is as far as the list ever got. Cocteau was the only one he could think of who was worthy of being included in an anthology of modern French writing! I recall having tried to get him to think of others, but Ezra was always very hard to pin down to the subject in hand, conversation with him had a way of drifting, and he managed to get out of the house without doing anything more about the list and with not the faintest show of embarrassment.

At the time, I attributed this to the vagaries of genius, but I am not so sure now. I am not so sure as to just how much Pound actually did know about young French writers of the after-war era. He was vaguely conscious of the Surrealists, while Aragon and Cocteau were personal acquaintances of old, and that, I discovered, made a great deal of difference with him. His friendship with Cocteau was an ardent one—I once accompanied him to the hotel room where the author of *Opium* was lying ill, recovering from the effects of the drug, and I remember how he bent over and embraced the pallid, shivering Jean.

There were, as a matter of fact, others who were inclined to doubt the depth and breadth of that erudition that Pound

was so fond of displaying. Flint had an anecdote that brings this out.

"We found Ezra one day," he said, "with a copy of Tacitus in his hand. 'Can you read that?' we asked him. 'I hope so,' he replied. And we all hoped so, too!"

Allowance here is to be made for Flint's peculiar brand of mischievous humor. It was not so bad as all that; but there was more than one who wondered if Pound was as much of a Chinese scholar as he let it appear that he was.

He was decidedly unpopular in London, that is certain. In the mid-twenties he was still remembered there from a decade before when he had been in the thick of the aesthetic battle that raged around Wyndham Lewis, the Vorticists, and their magazine, *Blast*. It was during those years (about 1916) that Pound made one of the "discoveries" of which he was proudest, in the person of the sculptor Gaudier Brzeska. The irrepressible Mr. Flint had an amusing version of this incident, also. He puts it into the mouth of Pound himself: "I walked into a café one day and Gaudier was sitting there. I took one look at him and I knew at once that he was a genius. I was right."

It was in London that Ezra had dug in during the war. Aldington was in the trenches, Ford had entered the liaison service, and even Eliot had tried unsuccessfully to enlist in the Navy; but Pound, safely out of it, scarcely seemed to be aware that a war was going on. There is little or no trace of it in his work and no reflection of its spiritual consequences such as is to be found in Eliot's *Gerontion* or *The Waste Land*. Instead, he was almost wholly preoccupied with literary-aesthetic questions: with *Blast* and the Vorticists; with Gaudier Brzeska; with the preparation and publication of his *Lustra* and his *Pavannes and Divisions*; with the French Symbolists, the Japanese "no" play, Chinese poetry, de Gourmont. The war years with him were a time of intense literary activity; what might be termed his second period was draw-

ing to a close and he was about to enter upon the one marked by the publication of his master work, the first sixteen *Cantos*, in 1925. But with it all, he was not too preoccupied to engage in the gentle Whistlerian art of making enemies; for he seems to have made one of just about everybody in town connected with the profession of letters. It was then that he moved across the Channel, although he was to continue to write for the *Criterion* for some little while.

There followed, in the early 'twenties, what may be described as his musical interlude. Taking up his Parisian residence in the little rue de Seine, he proceeded, in John Rodker's words, to fill the neighborhood with all sorts of weird "rumblings and tootings" as he practiced the "loud bassoon." For, while it may not be widely known to the general public, Pound is a musician as well as a poet and will be found listed in the British *Who's Who* as "poet and composer." Villon was the influence that set him off; and in 1926 his opera based upon that poet's *Testament* was given a partial performance in Paris. Meanwhile, Ezra had made another discovery, that of George Antheil, and *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony* had appeared in 1924. He had also, once again, quarreled with all and sundry and had moved on to Rapallo, Italy.

It was in Rapallo, in the beautiful lake country of northern Italy, that he found a haven at last. Here conditions were probably as nearly ideal for him as they could possibly have been anywhere. Relieved of the stress of personal encounter and word-of-mouth controversy, he could still carry on the fight—and frequently have the last word—through the medium of the mails; while round about him, in the little Italian village, he had gathered a circle of his own which gave him the adulation that, despite his bellicose temperament, he seemed unable to do without. In the café which was the meeting place of this *cénacle*, Gaudier's bust of Pound was the most prominent object in the room, something like an American Buddha to which in spirit all present bent the knee.

This likeness, by the way, is one that is worth studying. With the closed eyelids and the death-mask effect, it is doubtless intended to be heroic; but it may be that, as a portrait, it says more than the subject realized. The artist's excuse may be the plastic line, but the effect is like that of some of the royal portraits that Goya did, in which the painter, while appearing to idealize his sitter, did a masterly and unsuspected job of character delineation. Gaudier's bust, which has been reproduced many times, shows a face that is fat, fleshly, rather than spiritual or poetic; but it is Pound's favorite image of himself.

At Ezra's instigation, a literary journal known as *L'Indice* was founded in the vicinity of Rapallo, and in its columns (in Italian, of course) he would hold forth at great length on such writers as Robert McAlmon, Louis Zukofsky, Carl Rakosi and the American "Objectives" (long forgotten now), John Rodker, and one or two others; the impression conveyed was, as usual, that these were the worth-while representatives of contemporary literature in English, the only ones in fact that were worth bothering about. At one time he inserted a notice in *Il Mare* of Genoa inviting Italian writers to submit work for translation into English, "providing they think they can stand the acid test of such criticism as that of Zukofsky, Eliot, and W. C. Williams." It was a strange kind of shadow-boxing in which he indulged during this last phase of his migrations; for the Italians, it is safe to say, simply did not know what he was driving at, as he himself would have put it, and if they had depended upon his orientations they would have formed a bizarre conception indeed of our modern American writing scene.

From all this it should be evident that Ezra had taken what was for him the easiest way out. He had in a manner of speaking walled himself off from the world while preserving all his rancors and continuing his long-distance sparring. How long it might have lasted if it had not been for the turn of world

events or where he would have fled from there, it would be hard to say. There was, in truth, no place to go; for all through the decades of his residence abroad Pound steadfastly resisted the urging of his friends to "come back and have a look at America." "You don't know America," they would say to him. "You haven't seen it for over twenty years; you're always complaining about it and attacking it, but you don't know what it's like." But he was sure that he did know. Were not American publishers and American book-reviewers cold toward his work and that of his "discoveries"? Were not American officials bumptious and customs officers unspeakable? Add to this what he read in the *Congressional Record*, and he knew all of America that he cared to know!

It goes without saying that such a flight as his would have been out of the question for any writer without a dependable financial backlog. It is not everyone who can seek out a Rapallo where he can lie in a sun-drenched garden—in Byronic sport-shirts imported from London at twelve dollars each—and compose masterpieces for posterity. Ezra could not have done it if both he and his wife, Dorothy Shakespear, had not had money; for he certainly did not gain a livelihood, on his scale of living, from his writings. It was not until the United States had entered the Second World War and outside supplies were cut off that the Pounds began to feel the pinch, when they became solely dependent upon his earnings from the Italian radio, which amounted to anywhere from six dollars to twenty dollars a broadcast. For nearly forty years, from the time he first went abroad in 1906, he had been comparatively free of economic worries—of concern with economic questions in general—and this, with the old principle of "economic determinism" at work, together with his prolonged severance from the life of his native land, could not but have its effect upon the trend of his political thinking, if thinking it can be called.

Before that day when he came to look me up in Paris I

had had an opportunity to learn much of Pound's personal background, including details that are not likely to be printed in literary manuals of the future, and had had a chance to form a composite picture of him from the remarks dropped by those who knew him, including those who regarded themselves as being, and who were, his friends; for his friends, as I have indicated, saw through his weaknesses and in spite of them respected Pound the poet. Upon meeting Ezra in person, I was rather agreeably surprised. He was not at all the contentious individual I was prepared to encounter, but was gentle-mannered, pleasant, not in the least snobbish, and seemingly always eager to oblige, to render any service that he could. It may be that with certain ones he displayed his contentious side, but never with me. His bellicoseness, so far as I could observe, showed rather in his correspondence than in personal contact. He impressed me as being extremely democratic as far as social position went; if he was in any way an aristocrat or a snob, it was with respect to artistic ability and achievement; all he asked of anyone, writer, editor, bookseller, or whoever it might be, was intelligence, competence, integrity, a sincere devotion to the arts.

He did not visit us often, but when Rapallo (even Rapallo) began to pall upon him, he would take a train for Paris and, possibly, run across to London. While he did not avoid Montparnasse, he did not frequent the carrefour Vavin but only came there when he had an appointment with someone. When in town, he would dine at Fouquet's, which was beyond the everyday pocketbook of most of us, would look in on Ford, Joyce, Sylvia Beach, perhaps Cocteau and one or two others, and then slip out again. On these visits he was sometimes accompanied by his friend Olga Rudge, the American violinist who lived in Venice and whose boast was that she had given a command performance for Mussolini. Both she and Ezra appeared to accept the Mussolini regime unquestioningly and with tacit approval; it was not a subject

for discussion, and, for that matter, I never heard Pound talk politics in conversation, though he often did in his letters.

When he came to Paris, he never failed to get in touch with me, for there was always something about which he wished to see me. I was acting as European representative for Pascal Covici, who was putting out the *Exile* back in Chicago, and later for Covici-Friede of New York; and after Ezra became associate editor of the *New Review*, our relations were closer still. As we grew better acquainted, particularly in connection with the editing of the magazine, I began to discover how much of the American small-towner there was in him: there was the same stubbornness or "contrariness," the same "cantankerousness," the same "bossiness," the same "touchiness" that are to be met with in literally millions of his back-country compatriots.

His stubbornness he seems always to have had. As an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania, he had rendered himself unpopular by defending the Southern slaveholders' side in the Civil War. At the same time, he had from his earliest years a passion for being different, of which his fawn-colored beard was but one, not uncommon, manifestation, and would parade around the campus in European cloak and beret. As for his "bossiness," his dictatorial attitude, that was the thing that was constantly getting him into trouble wherever he went, and that had led him to abandon first London and then Paris. His "touchiness" was intimately associated with a sense of personal dignity, the consciousness which never left him that he was Ezra Pound, a fact which others must not be permitted to forget.

This last-mentioned trait led to an amusing incident one day when Pound, riding in a taxicab, stopped and offered to give Wambly Bald and me a lift to the place de l'Opéra. In the cab, Ezra and I for some minutes had talked of things of mutual interest, with Wambly sitting back like a graven image, erect and stiff and with the absolutely expressionless

look on his face that he frequently wore. Suddenly, at a lull in the conversation and apropos of nothing whatsoever, Wambly turned to Ezra.

"Your name is very easily Punned, isn't it?" he blandly inquired.

Pound glared at him for a moment, about the most savage glare I have ever seen. Then, directing the chauffeur to draw up to the curb, he opened the cab door.

"I think you are getting out here," he said to Wambly.

There was something truly Johnsonian about the episode. Boswell would have loved it.

As a literary adviser, Pound was not a great help. In fact, he was practically no help at all. It was not that he was not willing enough to be; it was, rather, that his range of interests was too narrowly personal. Pound and the half-dozen writers whom he approved—that was present-day literature. I have already told of his efforts to assist me in selecting writers for the French section of the *European Caravan*. It was much the same with the *New Review*. When I asked him to serve as associate editor, a post which he accepted readily enough, I can truthfully say that it was not with any idea of playing upon his prestige, for he was associated in one way or another with numerous young magazines and would grant the use of his name to any publication that would afford him an outlet for his grumblings and his peeves; the choice in my case was due to the belief that he might be of special assistance in connection with the Italian literary scene, inasmuch as he lived in Italy. I was wrong in this, however; for I soon found that he had quite as vague an idea of what "*I giovani*" were doing in the peninsula as he had of the activities of "*les jeunes*" in France; his interests were wholly limited to the little hand-picked group about him at Rapallo, none of whom was of the slightest consequence as a writer.

When the first issue of the magazine appeared, the *Criterion* praised the Italian selections and assumed that they must be

Pound's, but they were actually made by me either without his knowledge or over his protests; he did not provide me with a single Italian contributor. The thing with which I was concerned, in the *New Review* and in the *Caravan*, was giving the full picture; and this did not interest Ezra in the least. Indeed, I found that it did not interest any of my contemporaries; for this was essentially an era of schools, cliques, movements, and *cénacles*.

At times, Ezra as an adviser was a bit maddening, as when I handed him a couple of Italian dictionaries and asked his opinion as to which was the better. In place of opening them or even so much as glancing at the names on the covers, he balanced one in each hand. "This seems to be the weightier of the two," he announced. I thought he must be jesting; but he was not. It was another of his hunches or "intuitions," like his discovery of Gaudier-Brzeska. I need hardly have suspected any levity on his part, for he was, I think, the most utterly devoid of humor of any person I have known. That, I think, was one of his great weaknesses, his inability to see himself.

As an associate editor, he was given a department of his own to conduct and was accorded absolutely free rein, with no restrictions either as to space or subject matter. These columns make interesting reading today, not only for the views on writers and the state of contemporary literature that are expressed there, but also for the light they shed on the author's social evolution; for it was precisely at this period that his views began to change radically, yeering from a certain tolerance of the political Left and its cultural manifestations to a pre-fascist mentality (pre-fascist would seem to be the word) of the sort that is to be observed in his article entitled "Fungus, Twilight or Dry Rot," published in the *New Review*, No. 3.

In the initial number, Ezra paid his respects to William Carlos Williams, Wyndham Lewis, the *New York Herald*

in general and the *Chicago Tribune* (Paris edition) book page in particular, to Cocteau, Brancusi, the Surrealists, and the young American magazines, with a passing slam at the "pseudorasts and Bloomsburgars" for the benefit of his acquaintances across the Channel. Of Joyce he wrote:

I respect Mr. Joyce's integrity as an author in that he has not taken the easy path. I never had any respect for his common sense or for his intelligence, apart from his gifts as a writer.

On the whole, he was inclined to praise Lewis's *The Apes of God*, concluding his remarks on this head with the observation:

Sometime we will have to resign ourselves to the fact that art is what the artists make it, and that the spectator has damn well to take what he gets.

As for American writers: ". . . among the wise and prudent we have the critics, Hyatt Mayor, Mangan, Zukofsky. Among the writers of anecdote (all right, writers of anecdote) McAlmon and Caldwell." He alludes to the communist *New Masses* as "that red revolutionary" and criticizes it because it advertises "all Mr. Hemingway's perlite work but omits mention of the 'Torrents.'" He ends, however, by declaring this publication along with certain others to be "*d'utilité publique*." Toward Miss Monroe's organ he is not so kind:

Poetry of Chicago, now in its 37th vol. would be of more use if the young (confound 'em) would turn to and assist the longsuffering editress, dust out her office for her, clear out the boiled cabbage staff, and shake tip the critical section.

"I am pro-Cocteau," Ezra goes on to proclaim, "for the lucidity of his prose. I am pro-Picabia for the lucidity of his mind. I am pro-Brancusi, I see little else in sculpture now making. I am provisionally pro-Surrealist. . . . Naturally, at my age, I think I could have brought up most of these young men better than they have been brought up, but when I look

at their *elders*, the French literati of my own age, I am damn well pro-Surrealist and nothing they do causes me any regret or astonishment. Yes, I am also pro-Leger for the unflagging honesty of his effort. As Brancusi has said, *il sait vivre.*"

These excerpts will give a fairly accurate idea of Ezra's "thinking" and his "criticism" in this period. By the time he came to write his "Fungus, Twilight or Dry Rot" (1931), though he himself obviously did not realize it as yet, he was well on the road to a fascist ideology. He had acquired a deep distrust of democracy, the democratic process, and was talking in a language that now sounds familiar of a vague "plutocracy" and what it does to "aht and licherachoor." The influence of his personal and cherished peeves is clearly discernible:

Democracy does not, apparently, favor the sense of responsibility or even ask for it in its public servants. Familiar example: some little snot in an anonymous bureau of an anonymous dept. robs the people of millions by some damn fool regulation (10 dollar visa, for example; familiar example). As he doesn't get the money himself; as he hasn't the animal sense of the gangboss or pick-pocket, only the more enlightened cranks want him hung, drawn and quartered. He is not news. News is that somebody's brother-in-law got 12,000 dollars on a steal.

"Plutocracy," he goes on, "does not favor the arts. . . . Plutocracy hovering above demos favors the second-rate . . . the whole drift of democratic kultur is toward devitalization of letters and scholarship." Then comes a significant statement:

I was perfectly right 25 years ago in not bothering about socialism. It was not the affair of my time. The job of the last 25 years was for the writer or artist to get what there was to be got (artistically) out of the world extant.

At this stage, there is an evident confusion in Ezra's mind between communism and fascism.

When a country is governed by one percent of its population that one percent indubitably forms an aristocracy or something to which

aristocratical privilege pertains. Possibly no other aristocracy in 1931 has so great a sense of responsibility as the new Russian "party."

I suspect that the sense of responsibility elsewhere is confined to a few Italian fascists and a few "goddamned cranks" in the countries using that latter terminology. . . .

Both the communist party in Russia and the fascist party in Italy are examples of aristocracy, active. They are the best, the pragmatical, the aware, the most thoughtful, the most wilful elements in their nations.

And finally:

A distinguished American editor writes me: "Why don't you come home for a visit and do some articles on the American scene? The show is really magnificent. Hoover has fallen into complete and ignominious collapse and the whole country is in a state of turmoil and terror. The bread lines in the cities lengthen every day, and on the farms the yokels are reduced to acorns and grasshoppers."

And the alternative remedies are?

- (A) A proletarian revolution?
- (B) "A gentleman's revolution"?

It was the "gentleman's revolution" that Pound was to choose. (Incidentally, that "distinguished American editor" sounds like H. L. Mencken.)

On the *New Review*, Ezra remained more or less of a non-functioning though by no means a silent editor. He was constantly giving advice, but his suggestions were so vague as to be of little or no value. I believe he felt rather hurt that I did not always adopt his counsel—when I was able to make it out—but, outside of a few epistolary grumblings, he managed to keep his temper remarkably well. For he could be quite an even-tempered person when he chose to be, as was shown the night of the famous dinner when he came so near to being stabbed: he was not in the least ruffled by that highly un-

pleasant episode and did not appear to hold it against us for having got him into such a situation.

His reaction to the new writers whom the magazine introduced was rather curious. When Farrell had first appeared in *This Quarter*, Pound had written to me expressing enthusiasm: "This is the real thing." But his enthusiasm quickly waned. He was never explicit as to the reasons for this, but he was not apt to be enthusiastic about any discovery other than his own. I suspect that there was a bit too much of a popular flavor to the Young Lonigan tales to suit his palate. As for Henry Miller's work, he was too contemptuous even to discuss it. In such instances he frequently took refuge in a non-committal say-little attitude; he was not invariably the bold and slashing warrior that he gave the impression of being. This came out when a group of us in the Quarter, in 1930, issued a manifesto, under the title of "Direction," against what we regarded as the excesses of Mr. Jolas's *transition* and the "Revolution of the Word" crowd. From what Ezra wrote about it in the *New Review*, it was impossible to make out whether he was for us or for the other side.

There was one time when we had occasion to come to his defense. That was in 1932, when his opera, *The Testament of François Villon*, a piece in which he makes the fourteenth-century Parisian vagabonds talk like Chicago gangsters, was put on the air by the British Broadcasting Company. With one or two exceptions, like the *Manchester Guardian*, the English reviewers were savage in their denunciation of the performance. "Of all the clotted nonsense," declared the *Sunday Referee*, "*The Testament of François Villon* stands supreme. For an hour we had to listen to the quintessence of stupidity forming a mottled muddle of alleged poetry and synthetic histrionics." Which shows, among other things, that the old *Blackwoods* spirit still lives on in England. John Rodker wrote a piece for us praising the work as best he could.

The break between Ezra and the *New Review* came in 1932, after Peter Neagoe had bought a half-interest in the magazine and had become co-editor. Peter, who was a good friend of mine, definitely belonged to the Jolas-transition group, which had always been hostile to Pound as it was to his favorite, Cocteau, the "word-revolutionists" being unable to stomach the writer who had once declared that "literature is but the dictionary in disorder." With Neagoe's coming there was a certain shift of editorial policy and orientation, of which I shall have more to say later, and Ezra became advisory in place of associate editor. He went along, however, until No. 5—our swan number, as it proved—in which we published Kay Boyle's poem, "In Defense of Homosexuality, Accompanied by a Letter from Ezra Pound."

This was a rather obscure (for me at any rate) revival of an old quarrel between Pound on one side and Miss Boyle and the late Ernest Walsh's *This Quarter* (before Titus took it over). The poem was accepted by Neagoe and I approved, for the reason that I considered it a good poem, and in accordance with Pound's own criteria this should have been enough. Upon the appearance of the number, I received a brief note from him which read: "Dear Sam, April issue received. I presume it is time you removed my name from your list of editorial supports. At any rate please do so." He was surprisingly mild about the whole affair; and I had the impression then as on a number of occasions that while he was ready enough and fierce enough in assault, he tended, when attacked himself, to withdraw into his lair and lick his wounds, if one may put it in a somewhat hackneyed way; he seldom struck back.

I saw little of him after this, but we did have a final lunch together in Paris just before I returned to the States, in 1933. Bill Bird of the *New York Sun* was also present, and I think he will recall Pound's remarks on this occasion about the "Jewish publishers"; for by this time Ezra was openly anti-

Semitic. Perhaps, too, Mr. Bird will remember Pound's trying to put the words into my mouth, his efforts to get me to admit that the "Jewish publisher" was what was wrong with American literature. As I parted from the Sage of Rapallo that day, following our meal in a little restaurant near the Madeleine, I did not think that this would be my last sight of him. To tell the truth, if I had known that it was to be I should not have been concerned; for by this time I was thoroughly fed up with his kind of "thinking," which was no longer merely muddled but was becoming increasingly vicious. Not long after my return I took occasion, in an article that I wrote for the little magazine, *Mosaic*, to disassociate myself completely from his views.

As to what happened with Pound during the mid-'thirties, the late 'thirties, or the early 'forties, I only know what I have read or—more enlightening—what has been told me concerning him by those in a position to know. One of the most shocking things I heard had to do with his belated visit to America and his refusal to enter the bookshop of Frances Steloff (the Gotham Book Mart in West Forty-seventh Street, New York City) for the simple reason that Miss Steloff happened to be Jewish. Yet she had probably contributed more than any other one person in America toward winning a reading public for him. Her store was largely devoted to the expatriates, and the *Cantos* were always a leading item on her list, one which she did all in her power to advertise. I know this incident to be true, for Miss Steloff herself told me of it. And from another and reliable source I heard a story of his having sold an article to Father Coughlin's *Social Justice* for the sum of fifty dollars! His literary agent had endeavored to prevent this, but Ezra had insisted. It all took me back to the farewell luncheon in Paris, Pound's rasping words, the glowering look on his face which I had never seen there before.

And now, Ezra is up for treason. What is to be done with

him? What position are other writers and intellectuals to take in the matter? There would seem to be a peril in absolving the artist from social responsibility, in placing him apart from or above society, in treating him as though he were a spoiled child. On the other hand, to assert that Pound belongs in the same category as a "Lord Haw-Haw," a "Tokyo Rose," or an "Axis Sally" is simply to stultify ourselves.

One thing that is to be kept in mind is the character of the age and the agonizing problems that are presented for the intellectual, problems which assuredly are not to be disposed of by reducing them to a schoolboy's black and white. Posterity is likely to see a good deal more clearly than we do, and its verdict may be quite different from our hastily formed one. In historical perspective, Dante Alighieri was by no means a progressive in his political views and actions; yet do we so much as think of this as we enjoy the *Divine Comedy*? We are content that it gives us the supreme poetic embodiment of an age, an age in which, as in our own, horizons frequently grew dim. Should we wish Dante to have been cut off before his work was accomplished? And looking out over the postwar scene today, can we be as confident as we once were as to the purity of motives and noble intentions of those engaged on the side of "liberation"?

In any event, we must not forget that the revolt, becoming a technical treason, of Pound the poet was originally and essentially one against the uglinesses of our present civilization, even though he magnified his petty personal grievances out of all proportion. From where he viewed it, the spectacle of democracy at work in England and the United States was not an inspiring one. In his eightieth *Canto*, written since his imprisonment and published in part in *Poetry*, we read:

Oh to be in England now that Winston's out
Now that there's room for doubt
And the bank may be the nation's
And the long years of patience

And labour's vacillations
May have let the bacon come home

. . .

is the old terrace alive as it might be
with a whole colony
if money be free again?

This would seem to mirror his early confusions and wavering between the Right and Left, his old obsession with the monetary question.

In criticizing Pound, we are inclined to forget that one of the intellectual's chief social functions is to question, to doubt, to challenge, and that doubt with him may become an occupational disease. In every war, there are those who can neither agree with their country nor keep silent, and the authorities find it necessary to suppress their writings and send them to prison; but in the past it has not been the custom to execute such doubters, once hostilities were over. As far as practical consequences are concerned, Pound's offense scarcely went beyond this intellectual dissent. If he was guilty of treason in espousing a fascist ideology, it was, rather, a treason to the cause of human culture, to the spirit of man—a treason to himself—and there are no laws that fit the case. Studying closely his career, one comes to feel that it was all a tragic mistake on his part; and the question arises as to whether he has not been punished enough already.

It is my own opinion that Pound has been growing constantly more unbalanced for several decades, but as to the precise degree of his madness, that is something for the experts to determine. His lawyers, I am told, are now insisting that he was insane a quarter of a century ago, at the time I first knew him; and certainly there were symptoms visible even then that would appear to point definitely to such forms of mental derangement as megalomania and persecution mania.

All this, however, the question of his political guilt or inno-

cence, has nothing to do with his position as one of the greatest of modern poets, who has exerted a tremendous influence over the best of his contemporaries, such as Eliot, Yeats, and others, and who once again is producing some of the best poetry that he ever wrote. There have been poets in the past who were quite mad and others who were forthright villains, yet their works continue to adorn our shelves. Let us keep our values straight. Ezra may or may not be convicted of treason, but the *Cantos* will nonetheless remain the masterpiece we always declared them to be, and we still shall read and cherish them even as we lament their author's fate.

VI

Did You Ever Slap a Corpse?

IT MAY be, and doubtless is, true that the majority of café-sitters in Montparnasse were sublimely unaware of what was going on in the stimulating domain of French culture; but as Hemingway has pointed out, the "bums" with the wonderful kidneys were not the only ones; and whatever emerged in the way of significant writing or painting or literary and artistic tendencies among the exiles could hardly fail to show the effect, in greater or less degree, of the neighboring presence of the disillusioned young Dadaists, Surrealists, and others of the after-war decade.

The "Revolt of the Sons"—of the sons against their war-making fathers—was more or less continent-wide, but it was in France that it was to find its outstanding expression, particularly after the migration of Tristan Tzara from Bucharest to Paris. If the literary historian like other historians must have his dates, for purposes of fixation and demarcation, this movement may be said to have had its beginning on a night in that darkest of the war years, 1916, when a play entitled *Der Sohn*, by Walter Hasenclever, was put on in a Leipzig theater, thus anticipating by ten years and more *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

It is, perhaps, not to be wondered at if the madness of the generation that had made the war ended by infecting the ones who had manned the trenches, whose lives had been mangled or distorted by the holocaust. The reaction of the latter, in any case, had from the start a tinge of insanity; it was a reaction in the direction of the psychopathic, the paranoid, the unreal or the "superreal," and was marked by a

boundless skepticism and cynicism, a suicidal defeatism, pessimism, and despair. It too long has been the custom to attempt to laugh off the early after-war excesses of Tzara and his followers, for example, as being no more than a huge joke, an aesthetic hoax, what the French would call a *blague*; for the truth is that what was happening was nothing other, nothing less, than the phenomenon of the finest minds of a young generation rising up and crying a loud and resounding "*Merde!*" to all of human civilization that had gone before. To all literature, all music, all painting, all art of any kind created by that civilization, they deemed the only fitting response to be those primitive infantile syllables: Da-da—Dada.

This was the grim reality behind all the seeming exhibitionism of those first Dada *soirées*, with someone reading a jumble of words called a poem (cut with scissors from the day's newspaper, it might be) to the deafening accompaniment of saxophone and bass drum. It was more like a circus than anything else, and the Dadaists themselves were at pains to foster this impression, for they were determined not to take even their own disillusionment seriously. "Dada was born dead," they would tell you. "What is deader than Dada?" they would ask; and the reply would be: "Nothing is deader than Dada." It was the extreme of philosophic and aesthetic nihilism; and coming out of Dada, there was to persist throughout the 1920's an attitude that was "anti-literature, anti-painting, anti-music," virtually anti-everything.

In all this there was a ponderable carry-over from the attitudes and posturings of mid-nineteenth-century romanticism. The young of the *après-guerre* would, of course, have denied this vehemently. The Surrealists would have none of Baudelaire and his *Fleurs du mal*; yet their own Comte de Lautréamont, whom they had excavated from the same era, was quite as romantic in his way, while the most prominent link of all between the "revolutionaries" of 1920 and those of 1850 was

a certain monocled-Anglican *dandysme* which both alike affected. The greatest, most distinguishing difference lay in the typically modern stress on the dream and the possibilities of a psycho-paranoiac escape that was manifested by the Dada-Surrealists, and this was clearly a reflection of Freud and the comparatively new science of psychiatry. Where Baudelaire, Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, and their fellow romantics had looked for a way out in the exotic *paysage* or the fumes of hashish, their descendants-lineal now turned to the subconscious and the hospital for the insane.

Many a plain citizen who has stood before a Surrealist painting in an art gallery and wondered if the artist was crazy, may be interested in knowing that Surrealism, as a matter of historic fact, was actually born in a psychopathic ward. It happened in 1916. André Breton, a psychiatrist by profession who later founded and led the movement, was at that time stationed in a military hospital at Nantes. In the psychiatric section there was a shell-shocked patient by the name of Jacques Vaché. Breton and Vaché became acquainted, in a doctor-patient relationship, and the latter infected the former with a number of ideas which were to provide the philosophic base, if one may call it that, of Surrealism. These ideas had to do chiefly with a novel conception of humor and of fantasy. Humor, according to Vaché, consisted of "a sense of the theatric and joyless futility of everything when one is enlightened." He also was fond of saying that "the essence of symbols is to be symbolic."

Upon leaving the hospital, Vaché became one of the personalities of after-war Paris. Hiring himself out as a stevedore, he would spend his days, it might be, unloading coal on the quays; but in the evening, dressed like an English dandy, monocle and all, or else clad in some showy military uniform or other, he would saunter forth and make the rounds of the cafés; for this with him was the expression of a humorous *dandysme*, based upon his own concept of humor. In 1918,

he committed suicide by deliberately taking an overdose of morphine, forcing two of his companions to do the same; whereupon he at once became a sort of Arthur Rimbaud legend, and his personality was to leave its impress upon a decade of young French writing.

Suicide . . . no observer can fail to be struck by the manner in which this motive runs through the life and literature of the twenties in France. It is with a suicide that the "*après-guerre*" really opens and ends: that of Jacques Vaché in 1918; and that of the young Surrealist, Jacques Rigaut, in 1929. In the mid-twenties the Surrealists even conducted an *enquête* on the subject: "Is suicide a solution?"

Escape, a way out: that was the thing sought. The Dadaists had tried laughing civilization to death and had found that it could not be done—did they ever believe that it could be? They had ended by laughing at themselves. The Surrealists, in good part the offspring of Dada, were more serious. What they said in essence was: "If this world that our elders have created is the *real* world, then we want nothing to do with reality; through madness (Breton wrote a treatise on paranoia as a creative method) and the dream we will construct a *super-real* world of our own." This was one escape. There were others. Some, like Morand, Giraudoux, MacOrlan, and Delteil, endeavored to erect a new Jules Verne era through a discovery with fresh-seeing eyes of the exotic geography of that world in which they found themselves. Others, like Jean Prévost and Jean-Richard Bloch, turned to the human body, to sport and athletics. Some (Blaise Cendrars and Philippe Soupault) looked to America for a revivifying vitality; while others still, like Cocteau, had resort to opium or to neo-Thomism or to both, or, like Pierre Morhange and the "Philosophies" group, sought a "metaphysical revelation."

And all the while, thanks to Freud and Bergson, especially Bergson, there was a tortured consciousness, a fear, of being but a "split and crumbling personality." The "Problem of the

Personality," of which a good deal was heard in Europe in this epoch, was a very real one for *les jeunes*, and toward the close of the decade we hear the young "Discontinuité" group uttering the despairing cry: "Nothing is left us!" In the meantime, there were revolts and counter-revolts. Vincent Huidobro, Chilean modernist long resident in Paris, led a rebellion against realism and super-realism in favor of his own school of "Creationism" (Matthew Josephson was one of the American colony who paid tribute to him). Emmanuel Berl, rebelling at once against the bourgeoisie and against Bergsonism, proclaimed "the bankruptcy of the unconscious." That tired traveler, Henri de Montherlant, wrote his *Voyageurs traqués*.

Things reached a climax in 1924. In that year the critic Marcel Arland announced the discovery of "a new *mal du siècle*," and in the same issue of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* Jacques Rivière wrote of "a crisis in the concept of literature." It was indeed a spiritual crisis that the French young were facing, a crisis which was sensationalized dramatized on the occasion of Anatole France's funeral. Conducted under state auspices with great pomp and ceremony, this event was celebrated on the part of the Surrealists by a noisy and most indecorous demonstration and a manifesto entitled: "Did you ever slap a corpse?" For to them the world-renowned writer who had just died was the representative of a "gilded mediocrity" and an "amiable skepticism" that they spurned—they themselves were skeptics but not amiable ones. Needless to say, there was a great scandal and all right-thinkers were horrified; but had the latter given the subject a little thought, they might have perceived that this was, precisely, what an entire generation was engaged in doing: slapping the corpse of the past. And when the youthful *revoltés* wearied of this diversion, there was always an overdose of morphine or the mouth of a revolver.

The painting of the period—the painting that attracted the most attention—was likewise very largely engaged in corpse-

slapping. On the eve of the war, Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia and the former's canvas, "Nude Descending a Staircase," had created a sensation not alone in Paris but in New York and Chicago as well, as a portent of the kind of painting that was to come. It is common for the uninitiate to confuse Cubist with Dadaist or Surrealist art, but the truth is, they are vastly different. Cubism had come as an inevitable reaction against the late Post-Impressionist excesses of Matisse and the Fauves, a rebellion against the blur, the riot of color, into which the canvases of these painters too frequently degenerated; it was essentially a reaction in the direction of pure geometric form, a swing of the pendulum the other way, with a stress on the *construction* of a picture. Cubism may be said to have died with the war, and it is perhaps Andre Lhote's "Women of Avignon" (circa 1917) that definitely signals a "return to the picture" on the part of Picasso's followers.

In spite of its seeming excesses, Cubism was designed to save painting, whereas Dada definitely and avowedly set out to slay it; and this attitude and purpose was passed along by the Dadaists to their Surrealist successors, until, in the late 'twenties, we hear Louis Aragon openly proclaiming it in his manifesto, "*La Peinture au défi*." The painter of the future, Aragon declares, is to be one equipped simply with a pair of scissors and a paste-pot; in other words, pure *montage*.

This attempt to do away with painting as painting had been known in the past reached its high point about 1932. In that year, accompanied by an American painter friend, I stepped into an exhibit by Joan Miro. The "paintings" in this show consisted solely of blocks of wood and iron spikes in various arrangements. All were hung like ordinary canvases, with typical Surrealist titles, and a number of them were conspicuously marked "Sold." This interested me; for it seemed to me that I could just picture a British upper-class matron purchasing one of these "works" and hanging it in her Mayfair or Bloomsbury drawing room by way of showing her acquaint-

ances how advanced she was. My friend shook his head mournfully: "This," he said, "is the death of painting." I was inclined to disagree. "It may be the death of something or other, but I somehow have the idea that painting will survive."

As a matter of fact, painting *was* surviving in the person and the work of that giant, Pablo Picasso. Straddling the ages like another Leonardo, Picasso was eternally different yet always Picasso, a man of no school, not even of Cubism, for the founding of which he was chiefly responsible. And there were others working quietly in their ateliers and carrying on the best modern tradition in an effort to prolong and develop their art rather than to strangle it in a jar of paste. But it was the painting-slayers who were creating the fanfare.

The year 1929—the year of Jacques Rigaut's suicide—is commonly taken by literary critics as marking the end of the after-war era in France. "Is suicide a solution?" After ten years of talk and wordy "*enquêtes*," one Surrealist had tried it, just as Jacques Vaché had done, and the echoing sound of his revolver bullet seemed to come as a period, a full stop. It was also the year of the great Wall Street crash, and while the effects were not at once felt in Europe, one was to hear from now on more and more of "*la crise*." It was the French modernist painters who appeared to be the most conscious, and grievously so, of the falling off of the American market—the "*pays d'or*" and the society matron from overseas were failing them at last!—and certain ugly stories began going the rounds of the cafés. One had to do with André Derain and his famous "heads," which, so gossip had it, he was in the habit of painting *en série*, to cut up and sell separately afterward. Derain was noted for his fast living, the high-powered racing cars which he was always wrecking, and similar extravagances. There was talk, too, of Matisse and his expensive town and country houses; and even Picasso, a more or less sacrosanct figure, came in for comment because

at this period he lived above his dealer with a private telephone connection to the floor below.

Much of this was no more than malicious gossip, and I should not here be repeating it if it were not for the fact that it is extremely symptomatic of the period. One of the original modernist group, Maurice Vlaminck, put it all into a violent bit of prose which he appended as an epilogue to his one novel, *La Haute-Folie*.

"... Neither literature nor the arts," he wrote, "can say that they have been able to escape the frantically speculative spirit of the after-war years. The painting of the subconscious, for example, was a security that had to do with the stock-exchange, purely and simply, permitting the picture dealer as it did to become a broker, appealing with promises of a rapid rise in value to the covetousness and credulity of his inflationist customers. It was not a picture that was bought; it was a share of stock—there were fliers in painting as in gold mines, copper, or cotton. . . . A new firm would discover a new name and would float a new stock on the market. . . . An incomparable collaboration, symbol of the after-war decade, symbol of ten years of madness, of frenzied outbidding over a colossal mystification!"

(In passing, it may be of interest to note that both M. Derain and M. Vlaminck were later accused of collaboration with the Nazis.)

One thing I know of my own observation: about the time I left Paris (1932-1933), art dealers in the sixth *arrondissement* were to be seen standing in front of their galleries very much in the manner of race track bookies, ready to pounce upon anyone who looked like a customer, while on the Right Bank the spirit was the same even though the tactics might be a little more refined. The work of certain once respected painters, such as Kisling and Foujita, degenerated so flagrantly, became so commercialized, that it was an occasion of scandal about the Quarter. It seemed, for instance, as if Kis-

ling's "candy-box nudes" were to be viewed in every other window around the place Saint-Germain-des-Prés. I know, further, that the art press of Paris was utterly corrupt and that the most "authoritative" critic in town would, as everyone was aware, write an *avant-propos* for anybody's catalogue for the sum of five hundred francs (about twenty dollars). If the artist was bad, he was careful to say pretty nothings, but he would pocket the fee just the same.

It was, curiously enough, or significantly enough, with the coming of the depression that American snobs and American dealers began discovering the Surrealists. The Surrealists were thus put in rather an embarrassing ideological position. All along they had been declaring themselves to be antibourgeois, and here were the bourgeois, of the wealthiest and most snobbish variety, proving to be practically their only patrons. They were painfully aware of this contradiction, and, writing in their magazine, *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*, Louis Aragon undertook to explain it away:

By 1930 and 1931 our lucubrations have paradoxically come to be looked upon as an *objet de luxe*, and this precisely on account of their revolutionary character; seeing that bourgeois society will permit only ever smaller and smaller editions. The scandalous part of the matter is that there are certain ones calling themselves revolutionists who, hypocrites that they are, take literally the legend which would make of us writers for *snobs*, whereas if, through pecuniary coercion, we are restricted to a public which we have never regarded with anything other than contempt, it ought to be obvious that this restriction is but a highly perfected form of repression. Wild beasts in a cage are wild beasts just the same. They have thought up an ultra-modern prison for us, an up-to-the-minute contraption. Whatever the cost, we must find a way out. . . .

"Wild beasts in a cage are wild beasts just the same." But are they? In other words, the buying of Surrealist works by snobs is all a huge "bourgeois" conspiracy against these valiant

foes of the bourgeois order. That phrase of Aragon's, "*à tout prix il s'agit d'en sortir*," is worthy of note. In their efforts to find a way out, Aragon, René Crevel, and others were soon to turn to the working-class movement and communism; and Crevel was to spend his last days (he died prematurely soon afterward) in going about addressing meetings of Parisian workers. As for the others, some became fascists and later collaborators, one or two, like Éluard, heroes of the Resistance; but most of them remained Surrealists and nothing more. The adherents of the movement had long called themselves Communists, but their idea of the way to produce the anti-bourgeois revolution was at the opposite pole from Marx. They asserted that it was first necessary to bring about a "revolution in consciousness" by overthrowing man's belief in the real, where the Marxist would maintain that it is reality that conditions thought, rather than thought that conditions reality. This was always a glaring inconsistency in the Surrealist statement of principles, and it is not in the least surprising that Moscow about this time should have seen fit to call them to account by insisting that, if they were indeed Communists, they should prove it by active affiliation with the labor movement and the Party. They were, of course, not Communists, and the result could only be another split and fresh alignments.

A tout prix il s'agit d'en sortir! This is the cry that rings through those eventful transition years from 1929 to that bloody sixth of February, 1934, in the place de la Concorde. It is, indeed, a cry that is to be heard all down the decade from 1919 to 1929. The cry of "wild beasts in a cage" who were seeking, so desperately, a way out. And the American "exiles" who had come to France—was not this the object of their flight, also? How were they affected by the French young? How much did they learn from the latter, and what, if any, word of it all were they to bring back to America with them?

VII

Continental Vignettes

I. CHILD IN A DARK ROOM

(JEAN COCTEAU)

JEAN COCTEAU was one of the writers, one of the persons, whom I most desired to meet when I first arrived. I had been reading Cocteau avidly: *Le Grand Écart* and *Thomas l'Imposteur*—I had read *Le Potomak* a decade or so before and had been charmed by this version of “the dictionary in disorder.” When *Le Grand Écart* appeared in English translation, I had reviewed it for the *Chicago Evening Post*, and the author had written me saying that I was one of the few, “*y compris les français*,” who seemed to have grasped what he was trying to do.

Cocteau comes of an old, well-to-do Parisian family. Climb those spacious silence-haunted stairs at 10, rue d’Anjou, and you will be prepared for the quiet, deferential butler who opens the door. Monsieur Cocteau will not be in—I never knew him to be. If he is in Paris, he will be at a little *hôtel meublé* not far distant. If in Toulon, he will be found in a very similar lodging. His address is usually kept something of a secret; yet he is one of the friendliest of human beings, and the hotel keepers, the clerks at the desk, in Paris or Toulon, seem always to be among his friends. Once reassured by Monsieur Jean himself, they will take you into the circle.

Having reached his abode, you step off the elevator into a corridor so dark that you are barely able to grope your way; but your host, who appears to have cat’s eyes, is there to greet you, and locking his arm in yours he conducts you to a tiny bedroom that is darker still, with drawn curtains and a faint

odor—a suspicion, scarcely more—of opium in the air. It is here and not in the stately rue d'Anjou apartment that Jean Cocteau lives and writes and smokes and dreams; it is here that he receives his friends.

Seating you in the one chair the room affords, he lounges back upon the bed. A chair for him would be a superfluity, for he is never for a moment at rest; his arms, his legs, seemingly every part of his extremely mobile body, above all the muscles of his face and his black tossing hair, are in incessant motion. A second or two and he is out of the bed; his hand is on your arm or your knee; then he is racing about the room or pauses in front of the dressing-table mirror to glance at himself and shake back his hair.

Vain? There are those who will tell you that he is, that he is a Narcissist, even. They will adduce, among other things, his fondness for having himself photographed, and especially his penchant for those "particularist" camera studies of his person —his hands alone have made him famous and, in certain quarters, the subject of a facile gibe. He presents me with one of these photographs, and snatching up a pen he inscribes beneath it: "*Pour le mariage des enfants terribles*"; for I am at this moment engaged in translating his story of those terrible young ones. Yes, there is undoubtedly a stratum of Narcissism in Cocteau, but it is not the only explanation for those much-photographed hands. His world is a cosmos of unclassifiable bric-a-brac, and his hands, eyes, nose, chin—all are a part of this *bibelot*-strewn planet of his.

It is on visits such as this that I come to know, if not the real Cocteau, the one that Cocteau himself envisages, which is, it may be, as real as any.

"I am not a writer," he is telling me, "nor a man of letters. I loathe both those terms. I do not 'make' literature. What am I? I am the poet, always the poet, nothing but the poet." Consult his bibliography and you will find: "Poetry"; "Poetry of the Novel"; "Critical Poetry"; "Poetry of the Theater";

"Graphic Poetry" etc. Whatever he does, as he sees it, is poetry. And I like to think of the Cocteau I knew as the poet of friendship.

He is one who is capable of bestowing praise upon the work of his bitterest enemy, as in the case of Breton's *Nadja*.

"It is a splendid book," he says. "I like it very much."

Yet with Breton and his followers Cocteau is the object of a fanatical, unreasoning hatred, and the production of one of his pieces for stage or cinema—it may be *La Voix Humaine* at the Comédie Française or a showing of his film, *Le Sang d'un Poète*, at the Vieux Colombier—is a signal for a Surrealist riot. Perhaps, all in all, he is the most unpopular writer in France; he is practically ignored by the critical press. He is (or was—I am speaking now of the late 'twenties and early 'thirties) far more popular in America and in England than at home, where his name is anathema to the young *avant-garde*. Scandal seems to have dogged him ever since the *Mariées de la Tour Eiffel* epoch, when he was fighting the musical battles of the Six and of Picasso and his comrades in the realm of paint.

And now, the greatest scandal of all: his opium-smoking. What is one to say of this? Cocteau himself has described his "*désintoxication*," his cure; but there is in the book evidence for any reader that the author does not wish to be cured. Take opium away and there is a great white blank. Cocteau, I am convinced, will go on smoking; for opium would seem to be a part of that dark-bright world which he is capable of expressing with so blinding a lucidity, as he does for example in his *Essai d'une Critique Indirecte*, written while under the influence of the drug—it seems to add to his lucidity.

At times, I know, the habit causes him the most intense physical suffering. There was that day when Ezra Pound and I called, to find him in bed, curtains drawn as usual, under innumerable blankets and with an electric heater trained full upon him while the temperature outside was somewhere in

the eighties. The opium-smoker's chill. Nevertheless, he sits up in bed and talks volubly, not about his condition but about *Le Sang d'un Poète* and the *New Review*—he wants to give the opening night proceeds to the magazine.

In his book *Opium*, Cocteau speaks of "the living language of dream, the dead language of awakening," and adds: "One must interpret, translate." The volume may be said to be his "translation," his breviary of the dream. "It is not of opium but of the intelligence that one needs to be cured." The poet regrets his "waking books," those written before *Le Potomak*. It was with *Le Potomak* that he "began to dream." And why not? What is life but a "biologic vaudeville," a "*chute horizontale*"? "The same farce always begins again, and always one permits oneself to be taken in by it." "The work by which I am exploited had need of opium; it had need of my quitting opium; once again I am its dupe. I ask myself: shall I smoke again or not? Do not put on that unconcerned air, my dear poet. I shall smoke again if my work demands it."

Such is his smoker's apologia. He has said all these things in print; he has said them in person to me and to others. And I do not believe that there is anything behind his frankly spoken words that he or anyone else could uncover, unless it were the psychoanalyst probing the dark recesses of infancy.

I look at his slim, boyish thirty-seven-year-old figure, his nervous fluttering hands . . .

It is a dark world that he inhabits. Those drawn curtains about the bed are symbolic. Even when he approaches the radiant clarity of Thomist doctrine, as may be seen from his correspondence with Jacques Maritain, it must be by the paths of night. This passion for the shades and shadows is reflected in his predilection for such themes as Oedipus, Antigone, Romeo and Juliet, and is startlingly revealed in his *Orphée* drawings. But back of all this is the darkened room of childhood.

I think I began to understand Cocteau after I had read, and

especially after I had begun to translate, *Les Enfants Terribles*. It is no secret—all Paris, at any rate, knows—that this is a *roman à clef*. The author is explaining that the “children” were very dear friends of his. He had known them in a *maison de santé*. You can see as he tells you this what it means to him: it is something torn out of him; and he later puts it that way in so many words. He goes on to indicate what he wants in the way of an English rendering.

“I know,” he is saying, “that you did Delteil’s *Sur le Fleuve Amour*, and they tell me that you did it well. But this is something different. Delteil is lush, and the one thing I do not want is a lush translation. *Les Enfants Terribles* is stripped, bare.”

I submit this for the benefit of Cocteau’s critics as well as for any who may undertake to translate him in the future. His life to the onlooker may convey the impression of a certain lushness, a certain romanticism, and he has been seen, in disparagement, as the heir of Rostand—read, in *Opium*, what he has to say of him, and of Hugo—but for all of that, in his work, his poetry, he is and has ever been the cold and chiseled classicist. He himself has put it incomparably in his *D’Un Ordre Considéré comme une Anarchie*:

Each time that art is on its way toward that profound elegance known as classicism, emotion disappears. This is the thankless stage, when the glacial serpent abandons its variegated skin. But after many discomforts and a host of solitudes, art, all naked, achieves an equilibrium and sets over against a wealth of costume the riches of the human heart.

It is those “riches of the human heart” that interest Cocteau; but meanwhile, there is the thanklessness of the “glacial serpent.” Though the author of *Le Potomak* may appear to some to be anarchic in his literary tendencies—that *dictionnaire en désordre* once more—he is in reality, as he with his

superb gift of phrase-making has told us, an enemy of the "conservators of old anarchies."

Cocteau realizes the extreme difficulty, not to say the impossibility, of carrying him over into another language. His command of the other tongue may be limited and he must judge his translator largely from conversation and personality, but he still wishes to be of all the aid that he can. "Don't hesitate to ring me up, if you have any trouble." And thanks to the Cocteau habit of drawing upon such (to me) recondite phases of life as boxing, billiards, fencing, and what not, I do have to resort to the telephone more than once.

It is with his boyhood memoirs, *Portraits-Souvenirs 1900-1914*, published in 1935, after my return to this country, that the picture of Cocteau is rounded out. Here is the material that the psychoanalyst needs; for we here see the author as one of those individuals who, simply, refuse to grow up: the per-during child. Back in the days when Bernhardt and Houdin walked the boards, the young Jean is to be glimpsed adoringly watching his mother as she dresses for the theater, going into ecstasies over her wasp-waist, her leg-o'-mutton sleeves, her astrakhan furs. As I read these pages, I understand better the paternal attitude of the elderly butler in the rue d'Anjou and that of the concierges in the little hotels where "Monsieur Jean" lives. I understand, even, his fondness for playing—it is little more than that—with sailors and ladies of the night as he does on the Toulon waterfront, an experience which he and André Lhote have chronicled in their verse and brush collaboration, *Ports d'Escale*. It is a game with him, a childish-grown-up sort of game.

For it is a child's world still that the (by now) forty-three-year-old poet contemplates with a child's stubborn gaze. It is a world (*Je suis un mensonge qui dit toujours la vérité*) in which let's-pretend is the truest truth, in which aesthetics is summed up by the definition: "*Le truc c'est l'art*." It is a world in which Picasso and the Group of Six know what it's all

about, know how to "make believe." And the date of this world is 1919-1929. Since 1929, the world somehow has changed; something has happened in the strange realm of grown-ups, the child does not know what. He only knows, through opium-dimmed, or, if you will, opium-sharpened, senses, that his house of make-believe is tottering, the *guignol* glow has vanished, and the chilling glare of day leaves the tinsel hanging as—tinsel. If this has not happened yet, he feels that it is about to happen, and tries to be as brave as a child can be upon going into a darkened room.

2. REBEL SON

(LOUIS ARAGON)

Louis Aragon is in many ways the antithesis of Jean Cocteau; yet the two have this in common: both come from the upper-middle class, both are sons of the French bourgeoisie. Members of the younger war generation, both began their careers as literary-artistic rebels on the morning after the armistice, so to speak. While their revolt assumed an aesthetic guise, it was in reality against their class that they were rebelling. To understand this, one has to understand the French middle-class family and the intense hatred that the sons very frequently conceive for their elders, a feeling which with the First World War was vastly deepened and elevated into a social-aesthetic creed. These turbulent sons of the after-war years were out to shock not merely the bourgeois in general but their own fathers in particular.

Nor were the careers of Aragon and Cocteau so very different in essence down to that ominous era in the early and mid-'thirties when coming events began casting their shadows all too plainly and writers and artists, with a social-political consciousness forced upon them, had little choice but to line up with one side or the other. Throughout the 'twenties, however

much he and his comrades might talk of the "Surrealist revolution" and even, occasionally, of communism and the Soviet Union, Aragon as much as Cocteau was engaged in fighting the battle of art, and it was not until he had come to see the futility of endeavoring to overthrow a bourgeois consciousness without overthrowing the bourgeois himself, as a class, that he broke with the "party" constituted by his fellow aesthetes to join the one that stemmed from Moscow. During the years that I knew them, Aragon and the other Surrealists were devoting more of their time and energy to waging war against Cocteau than they were to undermining the existing social order. (Just how the feud ever started, I have never been able to ascertain to my satisfaction; but the author of *Le Potomak* had in some mysterious way become their Enemy No. 1.)

What makes the development of Aragon and Cocteau seem so dissimilar is the differing forms that the "revolt of the sons" assumed in the two cases. Both men had in them no little of the same Huguenot spirit, manifesting itself as a rebellious flouting of middle-class morality, that animated a Gide; it was, rather, on the aesthetic side that they parted company. Starting with a jumbled lexicon from out the chaos of which there still emerged a bewildering kind of clarity, Cocteau was to work steadfastly through the "glacial serpent" stage to a classicism that should express the "richness of the human heart"—shocking the bourgeois, meanwhile, with his personal conduct as Aragon never did; while the latter, master of a classic French prose which was the envy of the academicians and which might eventually have carried him to the Academy had he chosen to follow that route, was to forswear and violently combat all classicism of form. Having gone through the stage of Dada (with André Breton and Philippe Soupault he had edited, circa 1919, the Dadaistic review satirically entitled *Littérature*) Aragon was to go on and become one of the principal founders and aestheticians of Surrealism. It is

primarily by this radical divergence of artistic paths rather than by social or political differences that the opposition between Cocteau and the Surrealists is to be explained.

Today, now that he has indubitably emerged as the "poet of the French Resistance"—and one of the cultural leaders of French communism—Aragon is in a somewhat peculiar and unfortunate situation with respect to the average American reader who would form some kind of picture of the poet's personal evolution, his intellectual and spiritual development during the past quarter of a century. He is in a fair way to being the victim, on the one hand, of his well-meaning old-time friends who, afraid of the very word Communist, would present him as a pure aesthete, and, on the other hand, of certain of his party comrades in this country who lack the indispensable background for an intelligent discussion of his past and would make him out to have been always, more or less, the fiery and clear-seeing social revolutionist. Either picture is quite false.

Thus, we have, in English translation, a volume of his fine war poems edited with scarcely so much as a hint as to the author's politics, although he has been an important C.P. functionary for a decade past; and one reviewer is to be heard observing that the poet's work shows that something good can even come out of communism, "which was Aragon's starting point"—whereas the truth is, communism was not his starting but his finishing point. And we further hear a "critic" of the Left explaining that Dada and Surrealism, by reason of their "collective" character, were a training ground for Aragon the revolutionist.

The author of this latter observation, speaking without a first-hand knowledge of the scene, forgets that fascist movements—for example, Hitler's youth movement—also have a collective character and that this in itself proves nothing. The Surrealists that I knew were "collective," right enough, but in their tactics, their "raids" on any publication or café they

did not happen to like, their riots at any play or cinema of which they did not approve (with Aragon in the forefront always), they resembled storm-troopers more nearly than anything else. Aragon, I think, would now be the first to admit this, the first to disapprove of a false account. The point that he might make if he would is the sincerity of Surrealists like himself, René Crevel, and a few others in their ideological struggle against bourgeois modes of thinking, feeling, and acting. Then came the realization that they were "wild beasts in a cage" and must, somehow, find a way out, and from that point on they began to break with their past.

What I shall attempt to give here, accordingly, is a brief sketch of the Aragon that I saw about the Quarter. The Surrealists in this period were extremely cliquish and exclusive; and when I asked Aragon if they would consider editing a section of their own in the *European Caravan*, he replied: "Most certainly not; we never appear in anthologies with non-Surrealist writers nor in any save those published by ourselves." This was in contrast to the attitude of all others, of whatever group, whom I found only too eager to be represented. Most eager of all were the "seceding" Surrealists, Ribémont-Dessaaignes and his followers. But Aragon and his associates were bent upon preserving their "purity." The result, greatly to my regret, was that this particular section of the *Caravan* had to be summarized without the extended excerpts which I should have liked. Aragon nonetheless was friendly and helpful when it came to suggesting those who were not so "pure" who would be willing to contribute and whom he thought I should ask. That was characteristic of him.

Aragon and the other Surrealists were in evidence all over Montparnasse, in the cafés, bars, cinemas; we were constantly hearing of their exploits when we were not actually witnessing one of their tumultuous demonstrations. If they occupied a table in the Dome, it was invariably the noisiest of all and

they were the center of attraction. They did not mingle much with others, and I fancy it was largely on account of them that Bontempelli and his *Novecentisti* and De la Serna and the Spaniards preferred a quieter rendezvous such as the Rotonde or the café de la Consigne. Some of them, like Aragon, appeared to be on good terms with Ehrenburg, due doubtless to their Soviet leanings, but that the Russian writer was thoroughly disgusted with the movement as a whole is indicated clearly by his scathing article on the Surrealists in the volume of essays which has been previously mentioned ("Slow Curtain").

As for Aragon, tall, slim, handsome, with a distinguished and (though he would abhor the word) aristocratic bearing and a beautiful command of English that showed no trace of an accent unless it was of Oxford, he impressed me as being precisely what he was, as he would readily admit: a rebel son of the bourgeoisie.

"Do you consider yourself a revolutionist?" I asked him once.

"I most certainly do," was his reply. (He was very fond of that "most certainly.")

"But you do not come of the working class—?"

"No, I come of what you would call the upper middle class, the bourgeoisie. And it is only by being a traitor to my class that I am able to function as a revolutionist."

At this period we were beginning to hear a good deal of the "proletarian novel" and of the new "socialist realism" in the U.S.S.R.

"Do you think that you could write a proletarian novel?"

"No, I could not, because I am not a proletarian; but I could write a revolutionary novel; there is a distinction."

Coming of a family that possessed a large amount of influence in high places, Aragon if he chose could rattle the skeletons in almost any aristocratic closet in France; and he did not hesitate to take advantage of his position and put this

knowledge to good use when there was a cause to justify it. He even seemed to have a hold over Monsieur Chiappe, Parisian chief of police and one of the worst that any city ever had; or if not over Chiappe himself, over someone close to him. This became apparent in connection with the attempted suppression in Paris of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

The Lawrence work was being published by Edward Titus's Black Manikin Press, which also published *This Quarter*; and I therefore had an opportunity for a close-up view of what happened. Now, it is not like the French authorities to suppress a book merely for its outspokenness on matters of sex; it has happened in the past (Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*), but such cases are rare and there is usually some other motive behind the thing. There was in this instance. The British authorities wanted the book banned and they had brought diplomatic pressure to bear. It was Sisley Huddleston, English newspaperman and writer, who tipped Titus off, and the first person the latter thought of as a source of help was Aragon, who was quite sure that he could settle the matter. "Just leave it to me," he said. "Give me twenty-four hours." And within twenty-four hours the case had been dropped and that was the last that was heard of it.

I could not help wondering somewhat at the relation between Aragon and Titus; for the latter in the eyes of the Quarter was the perfect and most objectionable type of bourgeois, being intensely disliked for his lordly airs and the impression he seemed trying to convey of being the owner of Montparnasse. Married at that time to Helena Rubinstein (who lived on the other side of the ocean), he was looked upon as being wealthy and niggardly; but most of all, he was resented for having taken over the old *This Quarter* of Ernest Walsh and Ethel Moorhead and for having made of it something altogether different, giving another connotation to its name, even, which was really what he was buying. There

were also all sorts of tales about his harsh treatment of writers, but then you could hear those about anyone with sufficient hardihood to undertake the publication of a Left Bank review. In any event, he and Aragon were acquaintances if not friends; for Aragon had a way of getting around and knowing people, and Titus in his bookshop handled the expensive de luxe editions of the Surrealists.

Aragon might know people, but this did not mean that he approved of them or that he hesitated in the least to show his disapproval. I had a chance to perceive this one afternoon when Titus insisted that Aragon and one or two other young Surrealists come up to the study above the bookshop where the handsome bindings were kept. With ineffable pride of possession, his hands fairly trembling as he held the precious volumes, he brought forth his treasures one by one, permitting us to take them in our hands as a jeweler in the rue de la Paix might allow a customer to hold a string of pearls, keeping a watchful eye on him all the while. Aragon, however, refused even to touch them. "If you only knew," he said, contemptuously, "what I think of books like that!" (I can still see Titus's sickly embarrassed grin.)

This was, distinctly, the Dadaist of the early 'twenties speaking, the one whom our first batch of exiles encountered. Aragon liked to talk of his American friends of those days: Malcolm Cowley, Matthew Josephson, E. E. Cummings, and others; he seemed to preserve a warm feeling for them always and he had one or two good anecdotes to relate of that boisterous era.

"There was one night when we were all at a house somewhere down in the country. Cowley and Josephson and Cummings, I remember, were there. Our host had an elaborately bound set of the works of Racine, and by way of showing our contempt for this kind of 'literature,' we took the volumes and tossed them into the fireplace. Then, as they went up in smoke, we all stood around and urinated upon the embers."

I recall that he told me this with great glee; for he was then still very much the Surrealist.

It was the publication of Aragon's *The Red Front*, in 1931, and the storm which broke around it, that marked the turning point in his career. This poem first appeared in the initial number of *Littérature de la Révolution Mondiale*, a magazine put out in Moscow by the International Union of Revolutionary Writers. It was a fiery, ecstatic, turbulent bit of verse, extolling the virtues of the Soviet Union, the Five Year Plan, the Russian Young Communists, etc., and showed that its author was already ripe for communism although he had not as yet "come over." In his poem, he calls for an uprising of the French proletariat: "Let thy fury sweep the Elysées"; and it was this that was to get him into trouble with the authorities, especially such lines as the following, which were legally construed as incitation to murder:

Fire on Léon Blum

Fire on Boncour Frossard Déat

Fire on the trained bears of the social democracy

Technically *The Red Front*, which was translated into English by Cummings and published in the little American magazine *Contempo*, is a reflection of the technique of Vladimir Mayakovsky, who was a close friend of Aragon's and more than anyone else influenced his poetic style by teaching him how to make use of *faits divers*, or items of the day's news, as creative themes. Aragon had visited Mayakovsky in the Soviet Union and was deeply affected by the Russian poet's suicide. I met him by chance in the spring of 1928 as he was coming back from the U.S.S.R. I was returning from Germany and he was on the same train, but I did not know it until we stopped at Cologne, where I caught sight of his tall, unmistakable figure coming down the platform. I had an opportunity to talk with him for a few minutes and I remember the effe-

vescent enthusiasm with which he spoke of Mayakovsky and of the Soviet regime.

The issue of the magazine containing *The Red Front* had been on sale for more than three months when the police suddenly swooped down and seized what copies were left. Its author was arrested and indicted for "inciting to murder" and "provoking insubordination in the Army," the sentence that he faced being one of five years' imprisonment. In January 1932 the Surrealists began circulating a petition of protest throughout Europe and secured the signatures of many prominent writers. They were adept at creating a furor, and wide publicity ensued.

French literary politics, like Latin American politics *tout court*, are frequently intricate and hard for the outsider to understand, but the *affaire Aragon* is one of the most complicated on record. With his customary blitheness, the Left "critic" whom I have quoted above makes the statement that "frightened by the public outcry, the Government suspended the sentence." The facts of the case were quite different. There was an outcry, it is true, but it was chiefly limited to the Surrealists, and a number of outstanding liberals, including Romain Rolland, refused to sign the petition that was circulated in the author's behalf. Even the Communist *L'Humanité*, while condemning "bourgeois suppression" in general, went on to condemn the Surrealists with even greater severity for exploiting the affair to their own advantage. In an article published on February 9, 1932, *L'Humanité* declared:

. . . But we vigorously denounce the use of this affair by the Surrealists as a means of advertising themselves. In place of fighting bourgeois suppression, the Surrealists are fighting only against the suppression of a lyric poem. They demand political immunity for poets alone. "We protest against any attempt to give legal significance to a poetic work," they write.

We cannot approve of the stand of those intellectuals who fail

to stir when suppression strikes the workers and who move heaven and earth when it skims their precious persons.

The Surrealist position is a let-down pure and simple. In place of defending the content of the poem, they beat a retreat all along their "Red Front." Their revolutionism is only verbal.

They allow prosecution of the forms of exact expression of thought, but they want an exception made for poetry!

The bourgeoisie, in its suppression of the revolutionary proletariat, sometimes strikes those who are clinging by chance to the workingclass movement. Such is the significance of the Aragon Affair.

It was sentiments such as those expressed above that led Rolland and others to refuse to sign the petition. Still others signed under protest or with qualifications. In an article entitled "*Le Salut dans la fuite*," or "Safety in Flight," Charles Plisnier summed the matter up in the liberal *Journal des Poètes* of Belgium. Insisting that, despite all its pretensions to the contrary, Surrealism was but another "literary school," and adding that "if Lenin were alive, he would have laughed at this little bourgeois," the writer went on:

It is time to come out and say that this cult of gratuitous violence, this sport of seeing red, of listening to and writing down the word blood . . . comes out of the old romanticism in which even the phantoms wore fireside slippers . . . Surrealism is merely a secret malady in the brain of the bourgeoisie, a haunting preoccupation with suicide, a taint of madness, the anguish of the general paralytic who believes that he is achieving the acme of lucidity but who cannot tell you if tomorrow he will have a new and astonishing revelation or be riding around in a wheel-chair.

All of which hardly sounds like much of an "outcry" in Aragon's behalf. The hubbub, in fact, had soon shifted from *The Red Front* and its author to the Surrealist protest. The violent objections to that protest and the criticisms aimed at the Surrealists themselves led Breton to reply in a pamphlet

bearing the title *La Misère de la Poésie*. For Aragon, this proved to be the point at which he was to break with the exponents of the verbal revolution; and along with Georges Sadoul, Bunuel, Pierre Unik, Maxime Alexandre, and others he now joined the newly formed Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists of France. On March 10, 1932, *L'Humanité* carried this statement:

Our comrade Aragon has informed us that he had nothing to do with the publication of a brochure entitled *La Misère de la Poésie* and signed by André Breton. He wishes to make it very clear that he disapproves of the entire brochure and the clamor that it is making over his name. And he condemns as incompatible with the class struggle, and consequently as objectively counter-revolutionary the attacks that are contained in it.

For among other targets, Breton had attacked *L'Humanité*. The Surrealists now got out a second pamphlet branding the author of *The Red Front*—the poem they had been defending—as a “clown,” and announcing that this was the end of the *affaire Aragon*. To this manifesto were attached such well-known names as Salvador Dali, Paul Éluard, Max Ernst, Yves Tanguy, Tristan Tzara, and René Crevel. The last mentioned was soon to follow Aragon’s example.

Even this was not the end. The last word was had by the Left-wing writers Pierre Unik and Maxime Alexandre, who issued a statement defending while mildly censuring Breton and company, and criticizing Aragon for having termed the Surrealist leader a counter-revolutionist!

As for the charges against the poet, they were eventually and quietly dropped. This may have been due to any one of several reasons: lack of evidence that would suffice to procure a conviction; the desire to avoid a *cause célèbre* with the accompanying hubbub which the Surrealists were sure to maintain; or influence brought to bear upon the authorities by Aragon’s powerful family connections.

The short of the matter is that if Louis Aragon became a militant social revolutionist and, with Éluard and other of his former Surrealist comrades, a hero of the French underground, this was only after a long and stormy career as a verbal and aesthetic rebel—a rebel son of France's ruling class. He did it the hard way as most real persons do; and I cannot believe that, with his utter honesty, he would wish to be portrayed in any other light.

3. GIANT IN A BLINDED CASTLE AND ONE WHO
WAS NOT SO BIG

(PABLO PICASSO AND ANDRÉ DERAIN)

It seems to me as I look back that the painters and sculptors in the Paris of the 1920's constituted something like a world apart, on the whole a tranquil but by no means negligible microcosm that stood in contrast to the noise and feuds of the literary domain. It is true, there were French and other writers like Gide, Valéry, Joyce, writers of superior stature who in the quiet of their studies went on working out their individual and clearly marked destinies; and there were painters like the disagreeable Derain and the tragic Pascin who tried to combine art and Bohemia; but in general the picturesque and publicized battles of the era had to do with letters rather than with the plastic media.

For one thing, the Parisian public for some three-quarters of a century, from Manet and his "Dirty-Hands Christ" down through the Impressionists, the Post-Impressionists, and above all the Cubists, had been shocked so repeatedly in the galleries that it had become blasé, more or less immune to further jolts. Another point to be kept in mind is that painters and sculptors are seldom vocal; their battles must largely be fought for them by writers and professional critics; whereas words are the stock in trade of the literary man. With Dada and Sur-

realism an ideological fray began that mostly revolved around manifestoes and statements of aesthetic principle. With the exception of Picabia, Dada, which was professedly "anti-painting" as well as "anti-literature," had practically nothing to show in the way of canvases; and while the Surrealist painters attracted the public's attention now and then, as when they expelled Chirico, it was *Nadja*, or the always exciting pages of *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*, or a work like Aragon's *Traité du Style* or "*La Peinture au Défi*," that created the stir and talk and, very often, the brawls as well, that kept the Quarter from languishing with ennui.

It was, moreover, upon these truly shocking newcomers in print that the academicians trained their guns, rather than upon the painters as had been the case during the decade preceding the war. Even the once militant *Salon des Indépendants* had become a tame affair, to say nothing of the *Salon d'Automne*.

However this may be, I know that when I felt the need of peace and quiet, I used to like to visit the studios of my artist friends. It might be the atelier of Ossip Zadkine, Joseph Stella, Léopold Survage, or some other. Just to sit back and watch a painter at work (when he will permit you to do so), with only a word dropped now and then when he feels like it, is a great relaxation. As it happened, I was especially interested in painting and had been for a good many years. I was contributing a Paris art letter at the time to the *Chicago Daily News* and occasionally, as a substitute for Ruth Harris, to the *New York Times*. This gave me a certain entree, for I could always use the excuse of an interview, a device in which I found art dealers, American and Parisian, more than willing to aid me.

In the case of Picasso, however, I was almost as intimidated as I had been with Joyce. To approach him seemed like undertaking to interview Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo. I had heard much of the retired life he led and how he shunned publicity, even though he by no means avoided commissions;

for as I was to discover, he had a good healthy attitude toward the economic aspects of his art—healthy as compared with that of, say, Derain, or perhaps even Matisse. At this period, he was not living in the house in the rue des Grands Augustins, on the Left Bank down near the Seine, where he has resided since the mid-thirties; he was still married in those days and with Madame Picasso occupied a fairly pretentious abode on the Right Bank which was reported to be kept shuttered and barred to the outside world. Here it was, so I was told, that the founder of Cubism worked away at his canvases day and night, executing his commissions.

The picture that I was led to form of Picasso was, accordingly, that of an austere master-craftsman dwelling in an almost monastic seclusion which it would be a profanation to violate. I had had a somewhat similar impression of Derain when I first arrived, but was soon to be disillusioned in his case. Viewing the great ones from afar, across a breadth of ocean, one readily falls into the habit of thinking of them as pedestaled beings, remote and unapproachable, when they may be in reality anything but that. One had but to watch some of Derain's antics around the Quarter—more amusing to the performer than to the onlooker—and one would lose any awe one might have had of him. Outside his own set, he was not popular in Montparnasse; and while he was notoriously snarling in his attitude toward would-be interviewers, it was said that he was nonetheless eager for publicity and that his apparent aversion to it was partly due to a natural unpleasantness of disposition but was largely a "come-on" pose. Picasso, on the other hand, sincerely wished to be left alone.

At any rate, I met Derain before I did the mighty Pablo, and if my experience with him was to be taken as a portent, it was not a propitious start. Notwithstanding all I had heard, I looked forward to the meeting with keen interest. For a decade past I had been steeped in the history of the Cubist movement, reading everything that I could find on the sub-

ject. André Salmon, who with Guillaume Apollinaire and Max Jacob constituted the "literary Cubists," may be regarded as the official historian of the painting group that from 1907 to 1917 centered about Picasso, and Salmon's *L'Art Vivant*, published in 1920, had been for some years a kind of Bible to me—although as I read it again today, it sounds more than a little overwrought, vague, and metaphysical. Léopold Survage had introduced me to both Jacob and Salmon, and from conversations with these two I had rounded out the impressions gained from my reading.

As Salmon saw it, Picasso had been the "animator" of Cubism, Lhote its critic, Braque its "technical schoolmaster," and Derain its "regulator." In other words, it was Derain who tended to hold the movement steady, to guard it against the excesses inherent in a "*fuite aveugle dans l'abstrait*" and the divagations of those who, in Salmon's words, "not knowing how to make use of them, have swallowed whole the teachings of Picasso." It was he who brought to Cubism a needed touch of the academic (the new not the old academicism), a breath of the museum, the archeological motive, a wholesome emphasis upon construction. He had sometimes been termed a "ransacker of museums," but his findings had been placed at the service of modernity. It was this that made Derain an especially interesting figure to me, and it was things such as these that I should have liked to discuss with him. As to whether or not Salmon still held the high opinion of Derain which he had expressed in 1920, it was rather hard for me to make out; for he and Jacob possessed that sense of group and personal loyalty to old comrades-in-arms that is so typically French. But I could not help having the feeling that Salmon was a shade less enthusiastic about him than he once had been.

The meeting with Derain was arranged through an American dealer and took place in a little Montparnasse *bistro*.

"Well," he began, as he sprawled his arms upon the table opposite me, "what is it that you wish me to say?"

"It is what *you* wish to say, Monsieur Derain," I replied, "I have a few questions—"

"Does anyone in America," he interrupted me, "know anything about art? Does anyone really care about it over there? Oh, they buy pictures—"

"They buy *your* pictures, Monsieur Derain."

"Yes, I know—the *pays d'or*," and he laughed. "Well, we all have to live."

The interview, in short, was not a success. It was anything but smooth; for Derain was constantly evading a question, changing the subject, indulging in rather dubious witticisms—it was my impression that he had had rather a large evening the night before and was out of bed too early.

"If you write anything about me," he said, "tell the Americans that I paint the way I do because I feel like it, because I wish to paint that way. That is my affair, not the public's. If they care to buy my pictures, that is *their* affair."

"I did want to ask you," I went on, "about one criticism that has been made of your work, to the effect that you are essentially a museum painter, that you have taken something from all periods—"

"And what if I have? Supposing it is true, that also is my affair. The question is: have I brought something to modern painting? Ask Picasso, ask any of them—"

"And those women's heads which you appear to be so fond of painting, Monsieur Derain." I was in a bad temper myself by this time. "There are some who say that the reason you paint so many of them is because they sell—"

"They say! They will *say* anything." Then, glancing hastily at his watch, "I must go. I have an appointment."

I was to remember this "interview" when, during the Nazi occupation, I heard that he was one of a group of artists who were touring Germany to "lecture" on modern art—and when, still later, I read that he had been arrested as a collaborationist. Those lectures of his must have been marvelously

suitied to the Nazi mentality! I did not write anything about our meeting at the time, for I think that any American art editor would have hesitated about publishing such an article, as I myself should have done; and besides, I was not sure as to just how much that night before might have had to do with the case.

One thing that strikes me as I recall Derain, Drieu La Rochelle—the two remind me no little of each other—and other artists and writers who afterward became fascists, is the snarling, cynical, contemptuous disposition that they displayed even in those days; they were not only contemptuous of their public, but appeared to cherish a special hatred for democratic America.

As a result of my morning with Derain, I was more hesitant than ever about approaching Picasso, and there was now the added dread of losing some of my illusions about the greatest of modern painters, one of the greatest of all time; but my experience with him turned out to be very different. I discovered that he was not hard to approach by anyone who had some legitimate call upon his time. It was simply that, being a world-famous figure and an artist with work to do as well, he, like Joyce, had to protect his time and himself from a host of intruders. He was neither anxious for publicity nor averse to publicity of the right sort, though I think he justifiably feared that his views on art and his attitude toward his own work might be misrepresented. If he kept himself locked up in that blinded castle—and the reports of his seclusion were somewhat exaggerated—it was for the reason that he was a tremendous worker and wanted to get his work done.

I had thought of approaching him through his dealer, as I had done with Derain, but I decided against this: I would make use, instead, of my letter from Cocteau. This proved to be all that was needed, and I received a note inviting me to call and fixing an hour. Picasso received me warmly, a little more warmly, perhaps, than would have been the case if I

had not been a good friend of his good friend; although I later learned that he shows much the same restrained but very human friendliness to any whom he receives at all.

"So, Jean sent you? I am glad to see you. Will you sit down?"

I looked about me, not knowing just where I was supposed to sit; for the one or two chairs, the divan, and the floor were littered and piled with canvases, books, magazines, art reviews and portfolios, manuscripts, a cat and dog or two, and what not. Here, I reflected, was the proverbial "disorder of genius," but Picasso appeared to be perfectly at home in it, unperturbed by it all; no doubt it spelled order to him and he could have laid his hands, as he showed that he could, upon anything he wanted.

But it was my host who held my attention rather than the room. Here at last was the great Pablo in person; and as I gazed at him it seemed to me that he could not possibly have been called by any other name than that, for he was Spanish to the bone. I use that phrase "to the bone" deliberately: his Spanishness (there is nothing to do but coin the word) is something that goes to the bone and is in and of the bone. His face was bony, almost gaunt in a certain light, and Spanish, and Andalusian—Andalusian, or was it Basque? There were moments when I almost expected to hear him start speaking that unintelligible tongue. I think of him now in Basque beret and jacket—

My eye must have been roaming rather restlessly, for I caught a faint question in his glance.

"I was looking for the figurines."

"The figurines?"

"Yes." I laughed, amused by his puzzlement. "Those Egyptian and African ones that Salmon speaks of in his *L'Art Vivant*. He says it was those figurines in your studio that led to the discovery of Cubism."

Picasso smiled. "In the first place, you must understand that

'Cubism' is a label, you might say, that was pasted on us—on certain painters—"

"It was Matisse, wasn't it, at the Autumn Salon of 1908, who exclaimed: '*Mais c'est du cubisme!*!'"?

"It may have been Matisse or someone else. It was the name that was given us, in any event."

"But was there not a school, or at least a movement, a tendency, that justified the name? It is often said that you were the founder of Cubism."

"It was not an affair of one individual but of a number of painters who were seeking a new direction. I happened to be one of them."

"Who were some of the others?"

"Well, there were Derain, Braque, Lhote, Vlaminck—"

"Salmon mentions the mathematician, Maurice Princet."

"Yes, he frequently met with us. He taught us a good deal about the geometry of the picture."

"I am interested in hearing you use that word 'geometry.' Then Cubism did have a geometric, a mathematical, basis?"

"It was geometric in its tendency toward simplification and in its emphasis on construction."

"In that regard," I reminded him, "Salmon sees it as a 'return to the academy.' Should you say that was correct?"

"There is an element of truth in it."

"It was a reaction to the excesses of Post-Impressionism?"

"Yes, to a large extent."

"You speak of simplification—is that where the figurines came in?"

Picasso smiled again. "That is where they came in. The ones I had were Egyptian. They set us to thinking about form and how to simplify it."

"But the Africans—didn't they have something to do with it, also?"

"Yes, the African sculptures—Derain and Vlaminck were particularly interested in those."

"You would say, then, that modern art owes much to the Negro?"

"I should say it owed a great deal to him."

"And the Moorish element, the Moorish-Semitic—isn't there something of that in your own background, an influence that has been termed geometric?"

"There is something Moorish in the background of every Spaniard."

"Do you feel that your painting is especially Spanish?"

"It hardly could help having a Spanish quality, I suppose, seeing that I *am* a Spaniard."

"Those mandolins of yours, for example," I went on. "There are some who see in them a subconscious reflection of your Andalusian boyhood."

"Does anyone know what is in his subconscious? It would not be his subconscious if he did."

The talk turned to Picasso's famous "*époques*." He seemed to feel that this was simply the phenomenon of growth on the part of the individual artist, that every artist must necessarily pass through such stages. At this time, the Surrealists were loudly claiming him as one of their own, but he, while distinctly friendly to them, was standing aloof from this as from all other schools. "I am very much interested in their researches," he said, "but I am not a Surrealist."

I then fell back upon my stock question as art-interviewer, one that seldom failed to elicit an interesting response: "Just what is it you try to do, Monsieur Picasso, when you paint a picture?"

He thought the question over for a moment.

"I try to paint what I myself see—no, that is not it, for vision is not enough—What I see in my mind, rather, what I conceive—" At this, I was reminded of Salmon's statement of "the law that dominates the new aesthetic" (that is, Cubism): "*La conception l'emporte sur la vision*—the concept triumphs over vision."

In view of his subsequent evolution and the general interest in the subject now, I regret that I did not question Picasso regarding the social aspects of his art, the relation of art to society, with special reference to his own early "Blue Period" (1903-1905), which some have seen as exhibiting a certain feeling for the poor and oppressed and even as reflecting, possibly, the social struggle in Barcelona. If his views on these questions are not set down here, the fault is mine, for I was not concerned with such topics at the time, but rather with aesthetic questions and matters of art history. Just how he may feel about his painting in relation to his newly accepted creed of communism, I have no idea, and the reports are conflicting. But as man and artist he remains one whose sincerity and integrity are not to be challenged.

I did not meet Madame Picasso. She was, however, pointed out to me at the theater one evening, and I found that she looked very much like Picasso's portrait of her—and also very much like the "colonel's daughter" who later, in the mid-thirties, was to divorce her husband on the ground that he was a "nobody"! It was she who was to lay claim to half his property and enjoin him from touching his own canvases lest by doing so he damage her property rights. The "daughter of a colonel" was something in the France of those days.

4. PEASANT WITH THE LAUGHING BEARD (CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI)

In connection with the Paris art world of the 'twenties, I find there are two figures that stand out for me in sharp contrast to the general scene. One is a painter, the other a sculptor. Both were of eastern European peasant origin, and, as it happens, both were important modernists. This may or may not mean something to those who insist that modernism is a

movement that is essentially of upper-class origin. I am referring to C. Brancusi and Marc Chagall.

Armed with a note of introduction from the American painter Louis Lozowick and accompanied by my wife, I journeyed out to Brancusi's barn of a studio at No. 11, impasse Ronsin, in the fifteenth *arrondissement*. He was quite as friendly as Picasso in his greeting, and it did not take me long to discover that he was an exceedingly simple person, in the finest sense of that word—as simple, one is tempted to say, as one of his own polished bronze heads or as that "Endless Column" which at this time stood in the center of his studio and, rising upward with its ever flowing lines, appeared to be piercing the skylighted roof.

The high windows were thrown open on one side and through them could be glimpsed only the massed foliage of a tree in springtime bloom. The studio itself, like all sculptors' workshops, was a littered place, but very different from any I had ever seen. Absent were the usual busts and pedestals and classic poses: no nymphs or fountains or water-sprites or winged victories; no Madam or General or Honorable So-and-So done in marble for a price. One had the feeling, rather, of having strayed into a pleasant geometric dream. The Cubists, however, would hardly have been at home in this forest of spheres, cylinders, ovals (everything with Brancusi seemed to tend more or less to the ovoid) through which one had to make one's way to reach the sculptor. Clad in overalls, he stood there smiling his welcome—smiling with his eyes and, as it seemed to me, with that youthful brown peasant's beard of his, as well.

Now, beards are a common enough thing in Europe and were more or less the insignia of the Latin Quarter—the first thing an American just over usually did was to grow one—but Brancusi's beard, like his workshop, was different. I was a bit startled at first sight of him; for he reminded me of a grandfather who had been the best and closest friend of my

boyhood. My grandfather, too, was a peasant, a typical mid-American one, with brown eyes and a brown beard; and I always had the feeling that, as with Brancusi, both beard and eyes were laughing at me.

Brancusi resembled my grandfather in another way: in his simplicity and unpretentiousness; ready to extend a quiet, cordial, trustful welcome to any stranger, but a little surprised that anyone should seek him out. He was not in the least annoyed by the intrusion, but was like the peasant who is glad of an excuse to lay down his hoe or his ax (with my grandfather it had been a spade) and talk to the passer-by for a moment—about the job he is doing, about the weather, about anything, it does not much matter what. Brancusi, I found, was quite willing to talk; you had to broach the subject and draw him out, that was all. When he spoke, it was quietly and with a certain hesitancy which also impressed me as being a peasant characteristic; he was not voluble nor even fluent as so many of the modernists were, but seemed to be hunting for his words, careful to choose the precise one, and wasting none of them.

Yet I could visualize him, also, over a bottle of good wine with his friends in the *café* of an evening; that, I was sure, would be another, complementary side of him; for as he had said of Léger, "*Il sait vivre*—he knows how to get the most out of life."

This was the period when Brancusi was having his first sensational introduction to the American public through the stupidity of the American customs, which had ruled that his sculptures, since they did not constitute a "recognizable likeness," were not works of art and hence were not duty-free. Many who otherwise never would have heard of him within so short a space of time had gone to his first exhibitions to see for themselves, a few to worship, the majority to scoff—and it is possible that some of the worshipers were as unintelligent

as the scoffers. Meanwhile, the press was having one of those holidays when it can take time off to gibe at an artist. I had brought with me that day a huge stack of clippings which had been sent me from the States, and these I now turned over to Brancusi. I can still see the bewildered look on his face as he stood with one hand resting upon the pile (which he could not read).

"Why," he said, "why do they make all this fuss?" (*Brou-haha* was the word he used.) "I cannot understand it."

There were a lot of us, I told him, who could not understand it any more than he.

"It is true," he went on, "that my work is no longer academic. It once was, to begin with—here, let me show you—" And he brought out some photographs. "This is the first piece of sculpture that I ever did. It was done for a cemetery monument in Rumania."

I studied the kneeling figure of a woman that he showed me. It was in the best Beaux Arts tradition. Or was it? I thought that I could detect in it something more than mere academicism. But the sculptor himself apparently regarded it in that light.

"Here, look at this—you can see how I am beginning to simplify—purer lines, firmer, stronger—" He went through the photographs, one after another. Some he would toss aside without pausing; others he would linger over and discuss. He was almost painfully anxious to make clear the course of his creative development, to make himself and his work understood: what he was trying to do. It seemed to matter a great deal to him. He wanted the public to understand, and if not to sympathize and appreciate, at any rate to be patient, not to be hasty in its judgments.

I expressed a desire to have a reproduction of that first piece. He gave it to me readily. "I am not ashamed of my beginnings," he remarked.

"Then, it *is* simplification of form that interests you?"

"Naturally, it interests me. It interests, or should interest, every artist."

"You feel that this is the tendency of modern art?"

"Not necessarily modern art alone. It is the tendency of good art always, not to speak of great art."

Simplification! Stein, Hemingway, Picasso, Brancusi . . . It was near to being the watchword of the *avant-garde*. And yet never, seemingly, was life more complex. Here in Paris, in the bawdyhouse that Montparnasse frequently was, we sat and talked of simplification. The straight-hewn, upward-soaring lines of the American skyscraper—back in that America from which so many of us had fled—held a meaning for these artists. Léger was not the only one. I looked again at that Endless Column, and I recalled the thrill which two of my friends, Léopold Survage and Tristan Tzara, had derived one afternoon from a folder of picture postcard views of New York City. "*Mais c'est formidable!*" I spoke of this to Brancusi, and he was interested. I promised to send him some skyscraper photographs.

"The *gratte-ciel*," he observed, "is very significant; but you must remember that there were no skyscrapers in my Rumania."

One thing that impressed me upon this visit was his fondness for still-life arrangements. There were a number of groups of objects about his studio, and he had had these photographed. He went over the reproductions and presented me with several of them, which hang on my wall in front of me as I write these lines. Prominent among them is one of the "Brancusi egg," resting in a place of honor upon a cushion. This led me to ask him about his evidenced predilection for these particular geometric forms.

"Should you say that there is something in your subconscious?" For thanks to Freud and the Surrealists, the subconscious was very much with us in the 1920's.

"Does anyone know what is in his subconscious? Can you tell me what is in yours?" These were Picasso's identical words, almost. "When I think of form," he went on, "I think of these forms. They seem to go with purity and simplification. The cube is too jagged. It does not *flow on*."

"Then, that egg is not a mystic symbol?"

"A mystic symbol? I do not know—" And he laughed, laughed and fingered again that stack of American newspaper clippings beside him, and again there was that rather bewildered look.

As we prepared to leave, Brancusi also presented us with a fine photograph of his studio.

"I shall keep it," I told him, "to remember the place from which these things come." I pointed to the Column and some of the other pieces.

"Ah," he said, "but they come from here." He tapped his forehead. "Or," and he laughed once more, "from here." Laying his hand above his heart.

His beard was laughing at us as we went out the door.

5. MASTERPIECE FOR BABA

(MARC CHAGALL)

If it is his beard that I think of in remembering Brancusi—his beard, his eyes, his worker's overalls—the remembrance of Marc Chagall on the other hand brings back to me a picture of a charming little old Jewish lady, a typical "*baba*," but old only in years, seated in a small room at a sewing-machine with a large canvas, one of the masterpieces of modern art, hanging on the wall above her.

We were at Boulogne-sur-Seine, not far from Paris, where Chagall and his family occupied a comfortable though not luxurious house in the midst of the Bois, among flower gardens and bird-filled trees. He had conducted my wife and me

into the sewing room to show us the picture. His mother looked up at us with the placidity of those who are enjoying a pleasant old age, and her son presented us, but as she merely nodded, I could not tell whether or not she spoke French with ease. She waited patiently while we admired the painting, but we could see that she was anxious to get back to her sewing.

"This is Mother's room," Chagall explained. "I painted this picture just for her." He laughed as he said it; for he was very fond of what the French call a *blague* and we Americans know as kidding. I am not certain now as to which of the artist's canvases it was, but if I am not mistaken it was the one entitled "Flowers," with a large and a small flower still-life in the foreground and a Russian village in diminished perspective in the background. If it was not this one, it was one equally as good.

We were also introduced to Madame Chagall and to the painter's daughter. The latter and her paintings were very much in evidence; there was more of her work on the walls than of her father's. We were admiring her talent when our host, apparently not wishing her to be overpraised, intervened.

"All children can paint," he said, matter-of-factly. And perhaps they can.

Years later, in the early 'forties, on the platform of an artists' meeting in New York City, the young woman who sat beside me turned to me and said:

"You don't remember me, do you?" I didn't, for she had grown up. "Do you remember the day you came out to see us at Boulogne-sur-Seine?" And not long after, my acquaintance with Chagall himself, by now an exile, was renewed.

I mention these details first for the reason that they were the ones that struck me at the time: the quiet home life, honestly, unaffectedly true to his origins, which this battling modernist led, far from the tumult and the shouting of the Quarter and of art coteries in general. For back in his native Russia,

in Berlin alongside the Expressionists, and in Paris with the leaders of the contemporary art world, had he not contributed his colorful share to the formation of "*l'esprit moderne*"? At this moment he was even, like Picasso, being claimed by the Surrealists, who saw in his headless men, his human figures flying through the air and defying the laws of gravitation by reposing upon it, his tumbled Russian villages, a connotation of Freud and the dream. He was not inclined to take this seriously.

"What those gentlemen (*ces Messieurs*) do not know is what a peasant village—such as Liosno, where I was born—in old Czarist Russia looked like. They have never seen such a ghetto as that of Vitebsk, where a good part of my youth was spent. They have never heard the old Russian folk tales or folk songs. They have never seen a pair of Russian peasant lovers out for a stroll and playing acrobat. They have never seen a pogrom. What I paint is reality—real things—"

"But what about those men with their heads flying off?"

"There are plenty of headless men in this world. Haven't you ever seen them? I see them every day. All you have to do is to go out into the street." I darted him a quick glance; his conversation, I knew, could be as modernistic as his canvases; but I do not think he was jesting this time.

"The German Expressionists also claimed you, did they not?"

"I was painting that way long before I heard of either Expressionism or Surrealism. Possibly the Expressionists learned something from me, who knows? My painting comes out of life as I have seen it and lived it—and life, you know, can be more surrealistic than the Surrealists."

There was rather a heated discussion going on in the press that year as to whether or not there is such a thing as a Jewish painting, a Jewish art. Chagall was for dismissing the question. He waved it aside.

"If a painter is Jewish and paints life, how can there help

being Jewish elements in his work? But if he is a good painter, there will be more than that. The Jewish element will be there, but his art will tend to approach the universal."

I thought here of what Picasso had said in discussing the Spanish element in his own work. Here were these modernists, Picasso, Brancusi, Chagall, insisting that, contrary to popular impression, they were not fleeing life but were drawing closer to it.

I thought, then, of some of those scenes from the ghetto and the pogroms of old Russia that Chagall has given us; I thought of his mother there in the little sewing room; and I wondered if Marc Chagall was not more Jewish, even, than he perhaps realized. I could not help comparing him in my mind with the sculptor Marek Schwarz, whom I had visited not long before. Schwarz did not even care to discuss art, much less Jewish art, of which he has created some of the finest examples; what he wanted to talk about was the writings and the philosophy of Jacques Maritain, for he had recently been converted to Neo-Thomism. Chagall's roots, I felt, were too deep for anything like that.

As the afternoon wore on and one hour stretched into two or three, I began to realize how many-sided the man's genius was. In addition to his peasant, village, and ghetto scenes, there were his flower pieces, his marvelous still-lifes; there were the pictures of young lovers, of the bridal pair, of Madame Chagall, of the artist and his Muse; there were those canvases in which he seemed to be doing little more than compose a symphony of brilliant color.

He was then engaged in making the illustrations for La Fontaine's *Fables*. Indeed, this was the subject in which he appeared to be absorbed just now. He brought out the drawings on which he was working and showed them to us. He was eager to discuss the relation of the pictures to the text: how well had he caught the spirit? This was, clearly, no ordinary commercial task for him; his enthusiasm was plain to be seen.

Here was one artist who really could illustrate La Fontaine.
(He also did the illustrations for an edition of Gogol.)

Before we left, he presented me with an inscribed copy of one of his best etchings, showing the painter at his easel turning to gaze at his winged Muse poised behind him, while to my wife he gave a reproduction, also inscribed, of his painting "The Bridal Pair." His inscriptions were something more than the usual formal ones. We felt that we had really made a friend, several friends, that afternoon.

Outside, dusk was falling but we could still see the flowers and hear the birds, while the wood was all around. It was an appropriate setting for Marc Chagall, who so delights in painting flowers and so many of whose canvases have the quality of bird-song. Was it possibly, I wondered, the realization of a backward-looking dream—the dream of a peasant boyhood in Liosno?

6. FASCIST IN A DERBY HAT (FILIPPO TOMMASO MARINETTI)

Most Americans in Montparnasse may have known or cared little enough about what French writers and thinkers were doing—it did not require nearly so much exertion to go to a gallery and view paintings or sculpture—but they knew, if possible, even less of the Italians, the Spaniards, and those from other countries of Europe, despite the fact that Paris, the Latin Quarter in particular, was an international clearing-house of the arts. One reason for this was the tendency of outstanding foreign artists who took up residence in the French capital to blend so perfectly and intimately with the scene that one came to forget completely their non-French origin. Picasso, Chagall, Brancusi, the Chilean Huidobro, the North American Man Ray—how many others?

A further explanation may be found in the absorbent power

of the Parisian art world as exerted not alone upon the leaders but upon the rank and file as well. The result was that one might sit around a *café* table several times a week with a Scandinavian, a Rumanian, or a Czech and never think of asking him what was happening in a cultural way back home, nor would he display any interest in America; instead, the conversation would revolve about Paris and the life there.

To a large extent, each group tended to preserve its own miniature "nation," just as students at the Sorbonne had been doing for centuries. This was especially true of the Italians and the Spaniards. They had a certain Latin sense of the *patria*; and, moreover, there were frequently political motives, more or less dark to us, behind their expatriation which rendered them austere and self-centered and set them apart from the life of the Quarter. There were those, too, like Bontempelli and the *Novecentisti*, who were unpopular by reason of their politics, the fact that they lent their literary support to, when they did not actually serve as propagandists for, a fascist regime in their own country. In general, the Italians—they were not all fascists, by any means—like the Spaniards, kept pretty much to themselves, save when the two groups met together in the *café de la Consigne*. The Americans would watch them come and go, often without knowing who or what they were.

Among the Spaniards who occasionally visited Paris was E. Giménez Caballero, then editor of the *Gaceta Literaria* of Madrid, which was a sort of Spanish version of *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*. Later, he was to become a leading spokesman for Franco, but it was not possible at that time to tell which way he would go. As the years went by, however, his fascist tendencies became clearer. I met him once in a very fashionable and very expensive hotel where he was stopping, near the Madeleine. I had asked him to edit the Spanish section of the *European Caravan*; for I must confess that, in my political ignorance, I was taken in by him as I was by more than one

other in those days; but this personal meeting served, I think, to disillusion me. Aristocratically clad in a frock-coat, he pranced around very much as, I imagine, Herr von Ribbentrop did in the Munich era.

All in all, they were a dull lot, these literary fascists—dull enough when not stupidly clowning, in which case they were insupportable. The biggest clown of them all by far was Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the founder of Futurism. Like Drieu La Rochelle, a “fascist before fascism,” he had been uttering paeans to “War, Sole Hygiene of the World” for a decade past. I may have made a number of mistakes of literary judgment in my time, but I can truthfully say that Marinetti was not one of them; even though I did feel that his *Les Mots en liberté futuristes* of 1919 had antedated Mr. Jolas’s “Revolution of the Word” by a number of years, and even though I did publish him in one machine-art issue of my magazine.

Accordingly, when Marinetti came to Paris to lecture and the boys on the *Tribune* suggested that, by reason of my knowledge of Italian, I should cover the affair, I readily consented. I wanted a glimpse of the man who had hymned the “beauties of war” and the “odors of decomposition” from the battlefield. The lecture was given in the evening, before the upper-class Italian colony of the Right Bank, in a small theater off the Champs-Elysées; and that afternoon I interviewed the “poet” who was to deliver it. The interview took place out of doors, down near the Panthéon where he had gone for some purpose or other, and I found the author of *Zang-tumb-tumb* wearing what looked for all the world like a typical American derby. It proved to be just that. I thought that perhaps I was being a bit too personal in thus remarking upon an article of attire, but Marinetti did not mind in the least; he was proud of that hat and, removing it, showed me the label inside: imported from America. He looks, I thought to myself, exactly like a New York “bookie” of the old school.

Or was it the Bathhouse John of my Chicago newspaper days? I asked him what he was going to talk about that night.

"The Aesthetic of the Future," he replied, shifting suddenly from Italian to French; for the French language like American derbies was one of his numerous affectations, and many of his earlier works were first published in French until Mussolini began to frown upon this.

"And what *is* the aesthetic of the future as you see it?" I inquired.

"Futurism," was his succinct if none too illuminating response.

"You mean"—for I was trying to prompt him—"the aesthetic of the machine, such as Léger—"

"Léger! He does not understand . . . It is not a question of the machine alone but of the human body. The human body must become metallic like the machine, in order to subjugate it."

"And how is that to be done?"

"Through living dangerously. Life must become hard, metallic—"

"By that you mean war? I believe that you have said that war is beautiful?"

"It is not merely beautiful; it is essentially aesthetic. We Futurists have been saying that for years. It gives us new materials, creates new architectures. The poets and artists of Futurism know this. It is the principle that guides them in their search for a new poetry, a new plasticity."

I did not prolong the interview any more than I could help. It seemed to me that I had heard all this before; and some years later, in the manifesto that Marinetti issued on the Italo-Ethiopian war, I was to recognize the same sentiments and many of the same phrases: "A dreamed-of metalization of the human body. . . . War is beautiful for the reason that it fertilizes a flowering meadow with the flaming orchids of

machine-guns . . . for the reason that it combines in symphonic form the rain of rifle bullets, cannonadings, and momentary cessations of firing with the perfumes and odors of decomposition . . . for the reason that it creates new architectures, such as that of great tanks, geometrical squadrons of airplanes, smoke-spirals rising from villages in flame. . . ."

I can say one thing of the audience that turned out to hear Marinetti that night: they certainly had hard, metallic faces. The affair was under the auspices of the local Dante Alighieri Society, Mussolini's organization for cultural propaganda abroad, and there was an admixture of Italian and French upper-class fascists. On the stage from which he spoke the "lecturer" was perfectly in place, for his performance was nothing if not theatrical. He would speak first in Italian and then in French and leap about the stage and brandish his arms in a manner that forcefully reminded me of Billy Sunday or any back-country evangelist. His stony-visaged listeners gave him a little restrained applause but appeared only mildly interested, for they were too bored even to register approval of their own cherished platitudes.

The speaker was discussing the new Futuristic "aeropainting": "We Futurists declare that the changing perspectives of flight constitute an absolutely new reality, one that has nothing in common with the traditional reality of terrestrial perspective; the elements of this new reality are possessed of no firm basis, but are in fact constructed of perpetual instability; painters are enabled to observe and reproduce only by sharing in this same instability; we shall attain before long a new and plastic extra-terrestrial state of mind. . . ."

And this, I think to myself, is the man whom the respected Rachilde of the *Mercure de France* has saluted as "the first author of the first volume of humanity," and whom a Parisian journalist has dubbed "the caffeine of Europe." Bromide would seem to be the better word!

7. THE LONELY WHIRLIGIG (LUIGI PIRANDELLO)

It was in the summer of 1935, shortly after the start of Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. I had been back from France for a year or so and was living at the time down in the country near Lambertville, New Jersey, when I received a telegram one day from Saul C. Colin, Luigi Pirandello's secretary, urging me to come to New York at once. The "Maestro," as we always called him, wished to see me about something very important.

It was not hard for me to divine what the something was; the papers were full of it. Upon landing in America, Pirandello had given out to reporters at the boat a prepared statement—prepared, I am quite sure, by Mussolini's propagandist agency—in which he upheld Il Duce's "legitimate territorial aspirations" and the right of Italy to an "empire" like the other great powers. At that very moment, Italian planes were bombing the helpless Ethiopians as Mussolini's own son and other fliers reveled in what Marinetti describes, as "smoke-spirals rising from villages in flames." He might have added in this case: thatched-roof villages inhabited by an unarmed people who as they fled for their lives provided a fascinating target for the brave and "metallic" airmen engaged in "living dangerously" up above.

The conscience of American liberals had naturally been aroused, and Pirandello was met at the boat not only by the newspapermen but by a picketing delegation of the League of American Writers. Knowing him as I did, I could picture his bewilderment. Ever more ambitious and eager for money as old age came upon him, and looking, as so many European writers did, to the "land of gold" as a means of salvation, he had been elated by his contract with the Schuberts, for whom I had translated a couple of his plays. His previous American

visit had been a success; and now that his *As You Desire Me*, with Judith Anderson in the leading role, had made something of a hit on Broadway, he doubtless thought that this second tour would be a triumph. He had not reckoned with the course of history.

Clearly, he was in a scrape and he wanted me to come to New York and help get him out of it. Should I go? It was one of those agonizing problems which the man of today's world must face, when personal loyalties come into conflict with convictions that take on a life-and-death importance, for the reason that they are so much bigger than oneself. How tranquil and pleasant, how solid and durable by contrast, was that late-horse-and-buggy, "horseless-carriage" world I knew as a boy, a world which, so it had seemed, would last forever. Ezra Pound, Jean Cocteau, Luigi Pirandello: what would have been the ending of their life-stories in a world where fascism had not yet reared its head, and how different might have been the judgment of posterity!

It was, assuredly, a hard world for the intellectual, the artist, the writer—above all, perhaps, for the writer, whose very medium betrays him, who cannot take refuge in a charming flower-piece or other still-life but must utter words in an age when words all too frequently are turned into weapons. Were intellectuals in reality a weakling lot as some (an embittered revolutionist like Lenin, for example) would make them out to be? Or was it simply that they felt that they had a business of their own in life, which was to carry on the great tradition of arts and letters, and must, accordingly, in the manner of Ronsard, remain, as André Gide once remarked, "untouched by time and their age" and "stand apart from it all like an unruffled pool"? In any event, one could not but recall once again Apollinaire's line: "*Soyez indulgents — pitié pour nous. . . .*"

As for Luigi Pirandello, I could not but think of him as I had seen him so many times during the years that I was his

English-language translator: alone in a hotel room in Paris. I glance at the photograph that hangs on my wall: a lonely old man with a peaked gray beard, a high sloping forehead, a head that is all but bald with a few wisps of hair combed over it, a prominent aquiline nose and sad gray eyes, and the gray shirt and careless black bow-tie of the artist who is not a Bohemian. I remember the day he gave me that photograph. "*All' specchio inglese della mia anima*"—To the English (language) mirror of my mind" was his inscription. Surely, the least that I can do is to try to understand him now.

And so, I return in memory to that hotel room in the fashionable Étoile quarter and the old man who sits there alone with his thoughts, alone with that curious intellectual whirligig that goes round and round inside his head and that has given us a *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, an *As You Desire Me*, a *Tonight We Improvise*. From behind him, out of the distant past, emerges the figure of the Sicilian country school teacher who turned to story telling and who, taking up the tradition of Italian naturalism as represented by those "truth-tellers," the *Veristi*, wrote at first simple tales of the simple folk and folk-ways of his native island—tales such as will be found in the collection entitled *Horse in the Moon*. The young schoolmaster, whose father chances to be a wealthy sulphur mine owner, then goes to Germany to study and take his doctor's degree at the University of Bonn, coming under the influence at once of Teutonic logic and of William James and American Pragmatism, which with him was to replace a late-nineteenth-century Positivism.

From now on, life for Pirandello becomes more and more an incessant flux, an ebb and flow and shifting of all things, involving even, as in the case of his Cia, the human personality itself. As with Unamuno and the French young, the "problem of the personality" is to be the all-obsessing one. We find the first noteworthy expression of this in what Bernard Shaw has described as "the most unusual play ever written," *Six Char-*

acters in *Search of an Author*; and this old man with the peaked gray beard, the fine nose and forehead and the sad eyes, sitting alone in a hotel room, is still being pursued by those characters. Regimes and social systems may rise and fall about him, but he remains preoccupied with his own universe of dissolving phantoms.

But is this the only explanation of his loneliness? His personal life has been far from a happy one, and tragedy is with him in his home every day in the person of an insane wife whom he refuses to send to an asylum. And this is but one of a number of domestic sorrows. In latter years he has also been beset by financial worries, for there are many persons with expensive tastes dependent upon him, not only his immediate household but his sons and grandsons as well, and he must, he feels, be constantly increasing his income. I had a good chance to observe his attitude toward money. With me he was generous in the extreme and was always making inquiries as to whether I was being sufficiently well paid for my labors; but at the same time, he would haggle to a penny with agents, publishers, and producers.

Pirandello wanted not only money, nor merely fame, for he had that at home and abroad; he wanted formal recognition of his stature as a world writer, and this to him meant the Nobel Prize. I watched him scheme for it for a number of years (it was finally awarded him in 1934). I recall in particular one luncheon in Paris at which Pirandello, Colin his secretary, Marta Abba (the Italian actress who played Pirandello roles), and my wife and I were present. For a couple of hours we talked of nothing but the Nobel Prize, with the great dramatist laying his plans as carefully as any field-marshall.

I have always believed that literary ambition had a great deal to do with his attitude toward the Mussolini regime. Il Duce had made him a member of the Royal Academy; he was recognized as Italy's foremost playwright and man of letters;

and when the Ethiopian war came, he could not bring himself to break with what he conceived to be the national sentiment, and sacrifice his career by doing so. Accordingly, after receiving the long-coveted award from Stockholm, he came forward and contributed his Nobel Prize medal to be melted down along with the jewels of royalty for Mussolini's war chest.

At this point, one might stop and ask oneself: how many writers in any country refuse to go along when their nation is at war, even though the war be an unjust one?

In spite of it all, I am convinced that Pirandello's was essentially an apolitical mind and had come to be, increasingly, an asocial one. I tried a number of times to draw him out, but his reply invariably was: "Politics doesn't interest me." And I feel sure that he was speaking the truth. Politics did not interest him. Neither did social questions in general any longer as they had, to a certain extent, the author of the Sicilian tales. His attitude as I think of it now very much resembled that of the late General George S. Patton toward the Bavarian Nazis: political alignments were merely political alignments. They were not important enough to be permitted to interfere with his ambitions, his career, his very livelihood; and why should they not be utilized for his own benefit where possible, as when Mussolini offered him the Academy seat?

He was, to be sure, no Toscanini. He was a tired and weak old man, with many troubles, responsibilities, worries, and bewilderments; he was, if you wish to call him that, a coward who went along and became a fellow traveler of the fascisti; but that he was a fascist at heart I shall never believe. If he had been, would he not have been eager to expound his views, in place of saying "Politics doesn't interest me"?

He had too deep a fund of humanity for that. His early tales of his own Sicilian peasants show this; and in his work as a whole, and I think I have read it all, I never found anything that remotely savored of cruelty, of the fascist type of

mind. This—the man as revealed in his life work—is more significant than what he says or the smaller gestures of daily living; for a Himmler, we have learned, may be the head of the Berlin Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals! Still, in Pirandello's case, it is hard not to take gestures into account; for to all those around him he displayed a considerateness, a quiet warmth, and a graciousness that were irresistible. His treatment of his insane wife was characteristic of him—and all the while it was apparent that he was in love with Marta Abba.

I was not the only translator who had such pleasant relations with him. Before me there had been the late C. K. Scott-Moncrieff, to whom Pirandello had been extremely attached. It was in the dramatist's study in Rome, as the two were discussing a work which Scott-Moncrieff was engaged in translating at the time, that he was fatally stricken. Pirandello told me of it with great feeling. "He suddenly walked over to the window, put his hands to his stomach, and complained of not being well. He died not long afterward."

But what touched me most deeply of all was the trouble to which Pirandello put himself to become acquainted with my young son, making the long and tiring trip from the Étoile to Fontenay-aux-Roses by tram. The sight of the distinguished-looking gray-bearded old man with the face of a poet bending over to converse long and earnestly with a lad of five is one that I shall never forget.

What, then, was I to do that summer day in 1935? What would *you* have done? I did not go, and I never heard from Pirandello after that. I do not know to this day whether I acted rightly or wrongly. This is an age when visions blur.

VIII

Allons chez Hinky Dink

As to how much the first fervent fugitives from the aesthetic wastes of America may have derived from their contact with the European scene in general and the young after-the-war literary and art movements in particular, it is difficult to form any precise idea. It was the direct and barbarous impact of the war that was first felt, as is shown in the early work of Cummings and Dos Passos. Cummings unquestionably got a good deal in the way of poetic technique from Guillaume Apollinaire, although he carried it over and worked it up in such a fashion as to make it distinctively his own and American, not Gallic, in character. He, Cowley, Josephson, and others were associated with Aragon, Soupault, and the Dada-Surrealists; and as Louis Aragon has told us, they too had their moment of slaying the past by urinating on the collected works of Racine.

It would appear, however, that upon their return to America they brought with them little word of what was going on in France. They probably felt, and rightly, that such manifestations as Dada and Surrealism were not articles of export, not for America at any rate; but it might have done America good to hear of them all the same. As it was, they went back and became book reviewers, literary editors, publishing house assistants, and the like, producing occasionally a book of poems, a novel, or a volume of essays that held but a small reflection if any of their Continental experiences. That they personally had profited from that experience by becoming broader and more cosmopolitan in outlook, there can be no doubt; they have proved to be, decidedly, the leaven in what

would otherwise have been a too provincial lump, and in this way at least young Europe has made its contribution to our national letters and cultural life. There were, too, certain close contacts, such as those of Cowley and Josephson with Aragon and of Dos Passos with Blaise Cendrars, which were to be kept up during the following decades and from which both literatures were to profit.

So far as bringing word to America of European movements and outlooks is concerned, it was the little English-language magazines which were soon springing up all over the Continent that were destined to be the real couriers. Most famous of all these frequently ephemeral publications was *transition*, spelled first with a lower-case and later with a conservative upper-case T. Mr. Jolas's organ—for it was essentially his—has a unique place in the literary history of the period and cannot be overlooked by any future critic or chronicler. In popularizing the work of Joyce and Stein, which previously had been known chiefly to the select few, it performed an invaluable service. Although later it went off on certain sensational tangents such as the "Revolution of the Word" and the "Language of Night," this proved in the long run to be a wholesome jolt, while the attendant publicity served to procure more readers not only for Joyce and Stein but for a number of talented young writers—Hemingway, Kay Boyle, and others—who since have made their names. As is almost invariably the case, it gave rise to numerous imitations that were sometimes rather awful, but the editors are scarcely to be blamed for this.

It was not the only one in the field by any means; there were others both before and after *transition* was founded. Among Americans at home and abroad the little-magazine idea was in the air; but especially among the expatriates. A small group, or even a pair like Ernest Walsh and Ethel Moorhead, would find themselves alone in a European city; they would begin hashing over the terrible state of American writ-

ing; and the mysterious outcome of it all would be a literary review, financed even God very often did not know how. *This Quarter*, founded by Walsh and Moorhead, is a typical example. Walsh was dying of tuberculosis at the time, and the consumptive's proverbial hectic flush was to be discerned in everything that he wrote. I never had the privilege of meeting him, but his friends were almost fanatic in their devotion to his memory, and it was this that led them so to resent the taking over and bastardizing of the magazine by Titus.

Experimentation was the keyword of the advance-guard in those days, and most of the young American magazines published in Europe were devoted primarily to this type of writing. *Broom*, *Secession*, the original *This Quarter*, *transition* and *Transition*, and the *Little Review* in its final, Parisian phase all shared the trait in common. In addition to these publications, there were *Gargoyle*, *Morada*, the *Exile*, the *New Review*, *Tambour*, and, it may well be, others—they were so numerous that it was hard to keep track of them. Ford Madox Ford's *Transatlantic Review* has been mentioned in these pages a number of times; it stands apart as, essentially, the bringer of America to Europe. Pound's *Exile* was simply Ezra Pound. Harold Salemson's *Tambour* was small in size and appeared irregularly; edited in French and English by a very young American who, educated in France, was thoroughly steeped in French culture, it had a contribution to make, but unfortunately not much notice was taken of it. As for my own *New Review*, of which I shall have more to say in a moment, it was dedicated to *reportage*, an objective that, in an era of violent partisanship, was very generally misunderstood; and this, I must admit, proved in the end to be its basic weakness.

It was *transition* that really awakened the broader circles of the American intelligentsia to the fact that something was going on in Europe and among our expatriates; and it was not long until, thanks in no small part to Frances Steloff and

the Gotham Book Mart of New York City, Joyce, Stein, Pound, Eliot, Hemingway, and the files of *transition* itself became collector's items. Shortly after my return to this country, in 1934, I spent an evening in the suburban home of a wealthy Philadelphian, who whiled away the after-dinner hours by displaying to me his Left Bank bibliophile's treasures, discussing *transition*, and playing the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" records; and this sort of thing, I believe, was fairly common; not to speak of the innumerable beginning writers who strove to imitate the new-found masters—many of them in the process learned a good deal about their trade as they sought for a literary personality of their own.

The history of *transition* is rather curious and somewhat confused. According to the account given, with her usual bumptiousness, by Gertrude Stein in the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, it was she who was the inspiration and Elliot Paul the moving force in the inception of the magazine, which, when it ceased to publish her work, promptly passed out of existence; but this version is vigorously denied by Eugene Jolas and his wife Maria in the *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein* pamphlet that was issued by the group around *transition* following the appearance of Miss Stein's book. The truth seems to be that the idea was the Jolases' and that Paul was brought in by them. Jolas was then city editor of the Paris edition of the *Chicago Tribune*, Paul having succeeded him as literary editor. (This most advanced of reviews may thus be said to have come out of the local room.)

The purpose of *transition* as Mrs. Jolas states it in retrospect was: "To create a meeting place for all those artists on both sides of the Atlantic who were working towards a complete renovation, both spiritual and technical, of the various art forms." Founded as a monthly in the fall of 1926, the publication during its first year attracted considerable attention but was not especially shocking. Paul's influence was more prominent during this initial period; but with the second year the

magazine became a quarterly and Paul's collaboration, as Mrs. Jolas puts it, thereafter amounted to "no more than that of numerous other contributors." The remark is dropped in passing that Paul "through his meager knowledge of French and unfamiliarity with any other foreign language, was only superficially aware of what was being written in Europe"; and something is said of "heated arguments with regard to the publication of such men as Jouhandeau, Drieu La Rochelle, Breton and his Surrealist friends, to mention only a few, during which Paul at first opposed their inclusion until my husband's usually rather excited analysis brought final agreement and, more than often, later enthusiasm." Mr. Paul's side of the story should, perhaps, in all fairness, be heard here; but, in any case, the Jolases more or less took over from the second year on, although Paul continued as a contributing editor until June 1929.

As to the row with Stein, that seems to have been due to jealousy on her part of the space and advertising given to Joyce. She is said to have reproached Jolas for "neglecting her reputation," adding that "when Paul edited *Transition*, things were different." To which Jolas's reply is said to have been: "When did Paul edit *Transition*, Miss Stein?" The author of *Three Lives* and *Tender Buttons*, the Jolases felt, owed them a debt for "the rehabilitation of her reputation"; and Eugene, we are further told, "was never enthusiastic about her solution of language," but, nevertheless, this solution "was a very personal one, and language being one of his [Jolas's] chief pre-occupations, she naturally belonged with us. Her final capitulation to a Barnumesque publicity none of us could foresee. What we should have foreseen, however, was that she would eventually tolerate no relationship that did not bring with it adulation."

Whoever may have been responsible for its inception, *transition* very soon came to reflect the personality, tastes, and interests of one individual: Eugene Jolas. A youth of Alsatian

origin, he had spent some difficult years in America, working on newspapers and making a living as best he could, endeavoring at the same time to write poetry. Having taken an American wife, he returned to Europe and edited an excellent *Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Américaine*, which incidentally included the first French translations of Stein. Jolas's roots, as I was to discover upon becoming acquainted with him, were profoundly Germanic, and artistically he leaned to the Expressionists. This should have a good deal to say to those who would understand the magazine and the course of its evolution, particularly in its later "Language of Night" phase, as the darkness of fascism and war settled ever more deeply over the whole of Europe.

While no one could challenge his sincerity and breadth of modern culture, Jolas's editing was consistently "rather excited" and certainly had the effect of exciting the readers of *transition*. Back in the States, the little-magazine movement was going full blast and there was a general interchange of contributors, but it was the ambition of every young writer to "make" the overseas organ, which was by no means easy to do. Some even journeyed all the way to Paris, thinking to accomplish on the spot what could not be achieved from a transoceanic distance, and more often than not they were disappointed.

For, contrary to the impression that many had, Jolas was a very discriminating editor in that he knew exactly what he wanted and would take nothing else. He did not, I am convinced, accept anything for its sensational value, but only, as in the case of Stein, because he felt the author "belonged with us." Still, there were some amusing stories. One has to do with his discovery of Abraham Lincoln Gillespie. The latter had dropped down at a table in the Dome one day and had begun a monologue which ran something like this: "I was walking in the park this afternoon, *j'espère que non*, when I ran into So-and-So, *j'espère que non*, and he said to me, *j'espère que*

non, and I told him, *j'espèce que non*. . . ." And so it went on for the better part of an hour. When someone related this incident to Jolas, the latter is reported to have exclaimed: "Why, the man is a genius! We must have him for *transition*!" Charmingly apocryphal, no doubt, but there was a feeling that it could be true.

With his highly personal verbal experimentations which had in them no little of the psychotic, Gillespie was to become one of *transition's* more sensational exhibits. It was undoubtedly the linguistic aspect that appealed to Jolas, who was soon to announce his revolutionary theories with regard to language; and there were others as well who saw in Gillespie's prose something more than an affectation or a psychosis. "When Kay Boyle came back from Germany," Linc says, with all the humility of genius, "she told me that it was my work and not Joyce's that interested them there; Joyce to them was a back number." And Antheil will vouch for Gillespie's knowledge of music and his competence as a music critic.

Linc was quite elated at being published by Jolas, for it had been his ambition as it was that of so many others to appear in *transition's* pages. The night after the issue containing his first contribution appeared, I ran into him with his wife, a little Philadelphia school teacher whom we knew as Molly, at a studio party. He was riding the clouds and informed us one and all that his literary reputation was established. Molly, on the other hand, was deep in the dumps and hung her head as she tried to dance and be gay. Eventually I discovered what the trouble was.

"Linc and I," she said, "are separating."

"But why?"

"Because he's made *transition*."

"Because he's made *transition*? What does that have to do with it?"

"He says I'm not his intellectual equal any more."

And separate they did. That is how seriously some people took the matter.

It was when *transition* proclaimed the "Revolution of the Word" that the fireworks really started. The "Work in Progress" and Miss Stein's divagations had been exciting enough to the American public; and then, just as transatlantic readers had become more or less used to such fare, they were jarred by the announcement that "the revolution in the English language is an accomplished fact," that "the imagination in search of a fabulous word is autonomous and unconfined," that "the literary creator has the right to disintegrate the primal matter of words imposed on him by textbooks and dictionaries," that "he has the right to use words of his own fashioning and to disregard existing grammatical and syntactical laws," that the "litany of words" must be admitted "as an independent unit." This was calculated to set American critics and reviewers on their ears, and it did; while the reading public at large wagged its collective head and observed: I told you so; no good could come out of that kind of stuff they've been printing; and now (taking in the expatriates generally) they have gone completely nuts.

The manifesto that caused all the rumpus bore a number of well-known signatures, among them that of more than one writer who has since made a very good thing out of writing quite intelligible and non-revolutionary English. The signers included: Kay Boyle, Hart Crane, Whit Burnett, Martha Foley, Harry Crosby, Caresse Crosby, Stuart Gilbert, A. Lincoln Gillespie, Eugene Jolas, Elliot Paul, Robert Sage, Harold J. Salemson, and Lawrence Vail. What aroused more furor and fury than anything else was the declaration contained in the closing lines: "The writer expresses, he does not communicate. The plain reader be damned."

When the number of the magazine with the "Revolution of the Word" manifesto reached this country, Harry Hansen devoted a whole column of the *World-Telegram's* valuable

space to a discussion and refutation of the thesis it set forth. In passing he remarked that the document was couched in perfectly correct, grammatical and syntactical English and that the signers bore names, not "esoteric numbers," while some of them even sported middle initials. The late V. F. Calverton, an extremely bellicose individual, then took up the cudgels in the pages of his magazine, the *Modern Quarterly*, and the fight was on, eventually shaping up as a formal debate between the expatriate writers and the stay-at-homes. Max Eastman, Ernest Boyd, and others had their say.

In the course of this wordy encounter, which is now a matter of literary history, forgotten by most of the onlookers and almost wholly unknown to the younger generation, there was a tendency to overlook the essential subjectivist, asocial, or antisocial character of the revolt; but this aspect seems particularly significant today in the light of all that has happened since then. No thinking person probably would have disagreed with the statement that "Narrative is not mere anecdote, but the projection of a metamorphosed reality"; but such affirmations as "Pure poetry is a lyrical absolute that seeks an *a priori* reality within ourselves alone" and "We are not concerned with the propagation of sociological ideas except to emancipate the creative elements from the present ideology" (compare the Surrealists and the *affaire Aragon*) point to a definite flight from social reality and the social struggle such as has characterized the little-magazine groups in America from that day to the present, with the exception of a brief flirtation with the radical labor movement in the 1930's.

Not all of us were word-revolutionists by any means, although many American readers were inclined to identify exiles in general with *transition* and its manifestations. There were a good many who felt that the much-advertised "revolution" was getting nowhere rapidly and that it would be a salutary thing to call some kind of halt, at least long enough for

a calm and sane consideration of the question of language and modernism. It began, as most things did in Montparnasse, around a café table—things would start there and, if they showed signs of leading up to something, the meeting would then be adjourned to somebody's studio or room. There was a general feeling that a statement or a declaration of principles of some sort was called for; but when it came to the actual drawing up and signing of a manifesto, most of those who had participated in our discussions exhibited an inclination to keep in the background; for *transition*, I found, cast a spell even over those that did not approve of it, and these latter, not wishing to be branded as mere dull-witted conservatives, were accordingly none too keen about having their names appear.

The result of our lucubrations was a manifesto entitled "Direction" and bearing the subcaption: "For a contemporary expression, not an out-of-date 'modernity.'" It was signed "in behalf of 'Direction'" by Harold J. Salemson, Richard Thoma, and myself. Salemson, editor of *Tambour*, was one of the signers of the "Revolution of the Word" proclamation; Thoma was a young American writer of the Quarter, friend of Jean Cocteau; and all of us at one time or another had contributed to *transition*. Printed in black letters on a large yellow sheet, "Direction" blossomed out one morning on the walls of all the Montparnasse cafés (the usual medium of publicity), and another battle was soon in progress, the Battle of the Left Bank. Alfred Kreymborg, who chanced to be visiting in Paris and who had been meeting with Jolas and the latter's friends dropped his "mandolute" and leaped in, and for a week or two there was talk of little else than the latest news from the word-swept front.

In our "Direction" statement, calling for "a realistic intelligence and a spiritual order," we who signed it began by declaring that "The past decade has been one of pretenders, corpse-raisers, and cheap miracle-men," a phenomenon for which "the only explanation has been social chaos, not literary

necessity. . . . The thing has become not merely a fashion but a snobism, and a Joycean-Stein stutter is now the Shibboleth of the Gileadites. . . ." To this last we added the qualification that it was "not of necessity a reflection on either Joyce or Stein." We went on to draw attention to certain antecedents of the "revolutionists" of today, tracing the relation between their attitudes and those of the mid-century romantics; while as for the "Revolution of the Word," this, it was pointed out, was to be found in Aristotle's *Poetics*, Cicero's *De Oratore*, Horace's *Ars Poetica*, Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, and so on all the way down the line. Our basic protest, however, was against the overstress on form: "We call for a return to content."

Of Joyce we further said: "He is a figure enormous and out of time. Admiration is in order and inevitable; but that he should have influenced a writing generation is deplorable"; adding that: "Whatever has been learned from Joyce, Stein, or any other that may be of use to the contemporary artist in his task should be, and will be, utilized." Finally, we avowed, in upper-case type, our conviction that "Good writing does exist," but that there were certain obstacles to be overcome, chief among them being: "lack of knowledge, of orientation, of critical and aesthetic background; lack of feeling for the standard of writing, style (not to have 'a style' but to have 'style'); fruitless groping for the sake of novelty; failure to achieve a synthesis of the unreal and the real; lack of technical equipment, *métier*, which any effective craftsman must possess."

We also announced our desire for "an American art, not a badly translated and badly garbled European carry-over," while realizing that "America on the other hand needs to become more cosmopolitan. . . . Herein lies a paradox which she must solve." Freud and the dream, "magic," the intrusion of the advertising man into literature—all came in for discussion.

Probably almost no Americans who did not happen to be in Paris at the time ever heard of "Direction," and there are very few copies in existence today; but I believe that, coming when it did, in 1930, it is a manifestation deserving of record. For a while there was some little feeling between the *transition* and "Direction" groups, but Jolas himself took it in good enough part and he and I had a meeting in the café Flore, in that No Man's Land that centered about the place Saint-Germain-des-Prés, at which we talked it over very amicably. My respect for him, for his sincerity and integrity, has never diminished.

In the meantime, being under the constant necessity of earning whatever I could, I had begun working for Titus on *This Quarter*, where the only thing that I accomplished, as far as I could see, was the publication of Farrell. Titus and I had a definitive break in the fall of 1930, and I at once conceived the idea of starting a magazine of my own—rather, I had had the idea for some time. Start it on what, financially speaking? That was a question for harried wives to ask. The husbands commonly had the idea and the wives then had to become business managers, secretaries, mailing clerks, etc. I wonder how many other Left Bank consorts could tell a similar tale? For most publications were launched in just this manner. How the *New Review*, published quarterly, ever managed to survive for five issues, I shall never know. I do know that more than once I had to get busy and translate a book in a hurry in order to pay the printer. My wife with great nobility put the baby out with a *bonne* and procured a job with the Paris edition of *Business Week*, or otherwise we should have been faced with the alternative of giving up the idea or sleeping, all three of us, on the embankments of the Seine.

One way or another, the *New Review* came out. I asked Pound to be my associate editor, and he readily accepted.

George Antheil and Hilaire Hiler the painter were among the contributing editors, Hiler later becoming art editor. The last two numbers were published jointly by me and Peter Neagoe. In orientation the *New Review* followed, more or less, the line laid down in the "Direction" manifesto; but my own chief aim as editor was to give a picture of the scene: in other words, *reportage*. For I was at that time engaged in compiling the *European Caravan* (published in 1931), and it seemed to me that *reportage*, a survey, as the indispensable preliminary to a conceivable stock-taking, was the all-important thing at that particular hour of the clock. I still think that I was right. As I have said, I found few who were able to comprehend this attitude, and Wambly Bald once wrote that the *New Review* was "dedicated to the proposition that almost anything is literature." This, I think, was a little unkind, but I can understand how such an impression might be derived from a reading of the magazine, since if one is really to survey and report the scene, one is bound to publish some time, and with full awareness, something that is not good writing. But, as any editor will appreciate, such a standard of judgment is an extremely difficult and hazardous one to which to adhere.

In the course of its brief existence the *New Review* published such writers as Pound, Cocteau, Ford Madox Ford, Bontempelli and other Italians (we even, as I have said, gave a hearing to Marinetti in our machine-art number), Unamuno, Andrei Biely, George Antheil, Richard Eberhart, James T. Farrell, Henry Miller, Emanuel Carnevali, Maxwell Bodenheim, Boris Pasternak, Leo Ferrero, Mark Turbyfill, Gorham Munson, Iury Olesha, Nancy Cunard, Lawrence Vail, Selden Rodman, Thomas McGreevy, George Reavey, Samuel Beckett, Norman Macleod, Kenneth Fearing, Charles Henri Ford, H. R. Hays, and numerous others. In the beginning we ran rather heavily to Cocteau, whom the Surrealists and *transition* hated so heartily; by the third issue we were

giving a predominant attention to Americans, Farrell, Miller, and others; by No. 4 we were surveying the art of the machine; and our swan number opened with an excerpt from St. Thomas Aquinas. In the interim, many young American poets and short-story writers who had never seen Paris had had their first publication in our pages. All in all, I rather think that the *New Review* did afford a fairly adequate picture of that hectic period, and I cannot but feel that it has been the object of an undeserved and—from the point of view of literary history—unwise neglect.

In any event, during its two-year span, 1930–1932 (for like most of the little magazines, it came out irregularly), it was near to being the storm center of things in the American colony. No literary review, perhaps, ever had more publicity. In Paris it was constantly spread over the literary pages of the *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Herald*, Wambly Bald was always having a good time with it in his column, and in America, Winchell quipped at it and *Variety* noticed it. The Nancy Cunard article, "Black Man and White Ladyship," in the final number attracted particular attention from the columnists, and toward the end I received more than one hint that if I chose to sensationalize the magazine by "playing up the freak stuff" from Montparnasse, I might be able to "make a good thing out of it."

One amusing incident occurred in connection with Titus and *This Quarter* and Mr. Edward J. O'Brien and his famous short-story annual, with which Whit Burnett of *Story* and his wife, Martha Foley, were associated. Titus had made an arrangement for publishing some of the O'Brien selections and would go about the Quarter gloating over this; and then one day the *Tribune* came out with a *New Review* advertisement that read: SPECIAL ATTRACTION! NO O'BRIEN SHORT STORIES! This threw the cafés into an uproar and Mr. Titus into something bordering on apoplexy. Jolas and I had another meeting and laughed over the discomfiture of the common "enemy";

for our aversion to *This Quarter* and all it stood for was one bond that we had between us.

Then, there was that summer of 1931 when, having to return to New York on a flying trip to see my publishers, I trustingly left the *New Review* in the hands of Henry Miller and Alfred Perles. This was a perilous thing to do in Montparnasse. Possessed of a deep grudge against a number of persons whose work I was publishing and who were associated with the magazine, and against Pound and Farrell in particular, Perles and Miller at once began plotting to steal the forthcoming issue (No. 3) and fill it with obscenities composed by themselves. This, they figured, would put an end to the thing once and for all. Fortunately, my wife discovered the mess just as it was about to go to the printer and, salvaging what she could, managed to get out some kind of number. That issue was rather a sorry jumble, but in spite of everything, it contained a number of noteworthy items, including James T. Farrell's "Jewboy," Henry Miller's "Mademoiselle Claude," and Unamuno's "How a Novel Is Written." When I came back to Paris there were no hard feelings over the matter. It was all "*pour le sport*."

Gathered around the *New Review* was a group of American painters and sculptors of the more modern school, many of whom tended to make their headquarters in the little Galerie de la Jeune Peinture at No. 3, rue Jacques Callot, in the sixth *arrondissement*. The proprietress of this gallery was a charming Polish lady, Madame Liszkowska, who took a great interest in the magazine. Accordingly, late in the fall of 1932, the writers and painters began meeting together in Madame Liszkowska's place, and out of these conclaves grew a novel idea: that of holding a *vernissage* at midnight on New Year's Eve. That ought to wake Paris up; for a diligent search of the archives revealed no precedent for such an event. The show was organized, with thirty painters and five sculptors

represented. Among those hanging canvases were Joseph Stella, Abraham Walkowitz, Salcia Bahnc, Hilaire Hiler, Lee Hersch, Gwen LeGallienne, George Seldes (who also painted in those days), Jerome Blum, Martin and George Baer, Stella Bowen, Ann Neagoe, and Katherine Dudley. There were sculptures by Oronzio Maldarelli, Marek Schwarz, Gwen Le Gallienne, and others.

We had counted upon "*épater*-ing" Paris, but we really had not expected to create so much stir as we did. Rabelais was quite right in his remark about "a juggler, a pardon-peddler, a mule with bells." A *vernissage* at midnight! The whole town was excited, even the French, and the Right Bank as well as the Left. And then, to make things more interesting still, we had the unlooked-for assistance of a rival group of painters of what we regarded as the "old hat" school, who had scheduled a show of their own for the same period, though not for New Year's Eve—they were far too conservative for anything like that. The feeling between the two factions grew warmer and warmer and had about reached the boiling-point when Gilbert White, the academician, who was more old hat than the old hats themselves, came forward with a statement to the press roundly denouncing both groups.

"I object," Mr. White declared, "to these groups referring to themselves as the representatives of American art in Paris. They are the self-appointed geniuses of the day. No one has ever heard of them at the Ministry of Fine Arts. They are, perhaps, well known to the waiters at the *Dôme*. . . . What am I going to say when one of my French friends comes to me and asks 'Is this what you call American art?'"

And so on for paragraph after paragraph. Mr. White was very deeply perturbed by the whole affair.

Well, the *vernissage* was held and the unanimous verdict was that there had never been anything like it before. Some one had thoughtfully provided champagne, not quarts, seemingly, but gallons, and the tiny gallery could not hold the

crowd that came and kept coming; the entire street outside for a square in either direction was filled with people, and champagne *was* actually flowing in the gutter.

When the long, large evening was over, Joseph Stella and a number of the other exhibitors adjourned to the Dôme, and it was there that the trouble began. At the entrance to the Dôme terrace, big, burly Joe ran into Ary Stillman, a painter from the other show. I did not happen to be close enough to hear what passed between them. The first thing I knew they were squaring off like swordsmen, and then they started belaboring each other with their canes. The *patron* and waiters came running up to separate them and, unable to do so, had to summon the gendarmes, and both were dragged away to the nearest *commissariat*. It took us the rest of the night, between our sobering-up brandies, to bail them out.

French literary circles all this while were becoming increasingly aware of the literature in English that was being produced in their midst and also of the new writing that was coming out of America. It was Joyce and the installments of the "Work in Progress" as they appeared in *transition* that first aroused their interest. Not only was the work itself of a monumental kind, too big to be overlooked; they were especially interested because the author admitted having derived his technique of the interior monologue from an all-but-forgotten French writer of the end of the last century. The author in question was Edouard Dujardin, whose unpretending and somewhat jejune little novel, *Les Lauriers Sont Coupés*, was first published in 1887.

Joyce as a youth of twenty or thereabouts had picked up the book on a visit to Paris, and the result years later had been Bloom's monologue. It was in 1921 that the creator of *Ulysses* openly acknowledged his indebtedness to Dujardin (whose work has since been published in Stuart Gilbert's exquisite translation under the title of *We'll to the Woods No More*),

and ever since then the French concern with both writers and with their method had been growing. A new and definitive edition of *Les Lauriers Sont Coupsés* was brought out at Paris, in 1924, and M. Dujardin about the same time published a reminiscent essay on *Le Monologue Intérieur*. In addition, M. Valéry Larbaud, who like Bernard Faÿ served as a sort of liaison officer, had made a study of the form and had attempted a work of his own in the genre, the *Amants, heureux Amants*. Meanwhile, French reviews were discussing the subject and articles by Daniel Rops, Louis Gillet, and others were appearing in such organs as *Le Correspondant*, the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, etc. And *Ulysses* in French garb was soon to be on the bookstalls.

The Joyce cult—for the great man's admirers had made a cult of him, with all the metaphorical candles and processions, the genuflections and ritualistic observances that commonly go with a religious ceremony—now spread from Miss Beach's incense-filled little chapel across the street to Mademoiselle Monnier's and around the corner to the *Nouvelle Revue Française*; and so it was that one bright day the N.R.F. blossomed forth with a French version of a portion of the “Anna Livia Plurabelle,” accompanied by an account, written by Philippe Soupault, of how the translation was made. M. Soupault parted the curtains and afforded his readers a glimpse of the Joycean holy of holies.

Although the excerpt done into French covered less than a third of one issue of the magazine, it represented the combined efforts and arduous labor of seven individuals, French, Irish, and American, with the author himself sitting in. This “committee” held regular twice-a-week meetings, and Soupault even describes for us the size and shape of the table around which they assembled. Mr. Joyce occupied an arm chair and smoked “*des maryland*.” The text would be read and discussed, phrase by phrase, with Joyce occasionally putting in a word. Altogether, there were fifteen sessions of three

hours each, or a total of forty-five hours; then there were revisions and more sittings, and out of it all there emerged probably as good an imitation of the "Work in Progress" as was to be had in any tongue. Any who may be curious to know what *Finnegans Wake* would sound like in French may form an idea from the following sample:

'Ya elle square sòt ladys insmoking lill et un piqué et soaytera et soantera et Yangtsé de sweet, dans un 'tone sonora,' pendant que Oom Bothar reste en bas dans son manteau de sable tout embarrassé et sourd comme un pô, le stupe! Va t'en! Dear dur d'untendrel! Theiss en train de me charrier! Anna Livie que Gieu me juge!

There were some of us who felt like repeating this last adjuration as we inspected the result.

It was in this same period that a notable collection of American short-story writers appeared: *Les Romanciers Américaines*, well selected, edited, and translated by Bernard Faÿ, Victor Llona, Professor Régis Michaud, and others. Among the authors represented were Sherwood Anderson, Louis Bromfield, James Branch Cabell, John Dos Passos, Theodore Dreiser, Ernest Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, Ludwig Lewisohn, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Gertrude Stein, and Glenway Wescott. One of the stories included was Bromfield's "Let's Go Down to Hinky Dink's," rendered by Victor Llona's expert hand (formerly in the consular service, the translator had spent some fifteen years in Chicago) as "*Allons chez Hinky Dink.*"

"*Allons chez Hinky Dink*"—the words seem to stick with one, somehow. In a manner of speaking, was not that what we all were doing in the 1920's—going "down to Hinky Dink's"—and trying to translate the untranslatable?

In 1932 there appeared a volume which affords as good a retrospective view as is to be had between any one set of covers

of the expatriate writing of a decade and more. This was Peter Neagoe's anthology *Americans Abroad*, published by the Servire Press, at The Hague. Fifty-three authors in all will be found here, and certainly no one of importance was left out. When the volume reached America, George Jean Nathan promptly conferred upon it the distinction of being "the worst book of the year." A biased judgment, it may be, but—well, time has a way of deciding. Americans of the early depression years were not too impressed.

IX

The Ravens' Call

DATES are sometimes dramatic. On October 23, 1929, the stock market broke and men began jumping out of windows in Wall Street. Thirteen days later, on November 5th, Jacques Rigaut—or “Lord Patchogue” as he had come to be called from the name of one of the characters he had created—a young French Surrealist who with his brethren had long talked of suicide as the “solution,” the “way out,” placed a revolver to his temple and pulled the trigger in what was to all appearances a “theoretic suicide” pure and simple; in his writings he had declared that “suicide is a vocation,” and now he was putting it into practice. And on December 10th, the young Back Bay American, Harry Crosby, who for some seven years had been a prominent figure in the expatriate colony of Paris, was found dead in the Hotel des Artistes in New York City, having seemingly shot and killed first the woman who lay beside him (twenty-two-year-old wife of another man) and then himself, with not a scrap of explanation as to why he had done it; only when his three-volume diary was later published under the title *Shadows of the Sun* did the dark reasons of this wealthy, pampered “sun-worshiper” become in a measure clear.

Thus ended the “*apres-guerre*,” the after-war decade. Jacques Vaché, Jacques Rigaut, Hart Crane, Harry Crosby. . . . But perhaps the end had really been foreshadowed a couple of years before, on that August evening in 1927 when French workers had invaded the terraces of Montparnasse and tossed the occupants into the street.

Rigaut’s suicide and more especially Crosby’s threw a gloom

over those terraces from which they were never fully to recover. From that time on, something was lacking, something gone. Above all, we more and more had the feeling that something was to come, something was hanging over us. We carried on; we drank our *fines* and our pernods and we even dropped into them our hollow-ringing little gibes at death and suicide, the absurd futility of life, and the hopeless stupidity of an America that was incapable of appreciating the artist. It is likely that most of the Montparnasse "exiles" never had known Crosby personally, any more than they had known Jacques Rigaut. But he had been a member of the *transition* coterie; his friends had included the Jolases, Kay Boyle, Hart Crane, Cummings, MacLeish, and others; he had become slightly famous for the open house that he kept just outside of Paris for writers, artists, opium smokers, pederasts, absinthe-drinkers; he wrote startling hymns to death and the sun which were published in *transition*, and had founded a publishing venture, the Black Sun Press. His death, accordingly, and the manner of it were something that belonged to Montparnasse. It was symbolic, all too symbolic, a little too close to home.

For there was more than one Harry Crosby on the Left Bank. Harry Crosbys who had written their hymns to the sun and never had got them published but who did not have the courage or the madness that Crosby did to follow the thing through to the end. Like him, however, they were never very far from the fluctuations of the stock-ticker—he, too, had lost money in that autumn of 1929—and their aesthetic revolt, their opium and their opiate dreams, their absinthe, and their "little Hindu love books" were all conditioned by this dependency which they would have liked to forget. No one, probably, would ever call Crosby a first-rate poet; it is doubtful if he is, even, a poet to be remembered, although his diary remains a unique and significant document. He was a rich man's son, out of the Back Bay, Groton, and Harvard, who all his life

long had been trying to run away from it all and who never quite succeeded, even in death. Yet it is only by his death that he lives—as that tragic thing: a sign of the times.

He was a rich man's son who, scarred by the war (he had been an ambulance driver), had come to loathe people in general and the plain people in particular, along with all the simple pleasures and most deeply compensating experiences that the "common" man may know. As a consequence, he ended by hating life itself, finding refuge only in drugs, and sex, and alcohol, perversions of every sort, and a final, mystical, self-inflicted extinction in the arms of a blazing "Sun-God."

The effects of "*la crise*" were being felt in France. The first repercussions were not financial or economic but what may be termed spiritual. It is true that we still went on sitting in the cafés, talking of art and our souls and America—why was it we never could forget America? From overseas, however, we were hearing rumors and reports. Reports not only of what had happened in Wall Street on that October day; we were beginning to observe, also, in the books and magazines that came to us from home the note of a new, an unwonted seriousness that did not seem to go with that America whose unendurable shallowness we had fled in the early or the mid-'twenties. Could the United States be coming of age at last? We wondered. At the same time, it made us feel a trifle uneasy, uncomfortable; I think the truth is that our consciences began to hurt us a little. We somehow did not seem quite so important to ourselves as we had before. Although we did not realize it, the sustaining *raison d'être* of our exile was being dragged from under us.

To be sure, there were recent developments that we did not like or that we looked upon with suspicion. We had listened to the first ear-grating sound films and were not pleased but rather feared what would happen to the art of the silent movies in which the Chaplin-loving advance-guard was so

greatly interested. We had heard of radios in taxicabs and we were horrified. Then we would read a fine book like Edmund Wilson's *The American Jitters*, and we would realize that, in spite of the talkies and the radio and Helen Morgan on top of the piano singing "I'd rather be lonely than happy with somebody else," a change was going on in our native land and we were out of it. We were out of it, and we were not sure that we liked being out of it any too well.

We were not to be out of it for long. Slowly but surely the depression was making itself felt among us. In this connection I think of a painter friend of mine. He did more drinking than painting and had always been a gay and amusing café companion. Then one day he appeared at the Dôme looking as if he had lost his last friend. He showed me a letter he had just received from his mother, one or two lines of which have stuck in my memory: "Things are going very badly with your father's business. He does nothing but pray now, all night long. I wake up in the middle of the night and see him there, down on his knees." Shortly afterward, our friend told us that his allowance had been stopped and he was going back. The great homeward trek had begun.

Down in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés district artists and their dealers, like hucksters, were feverishly trying to dispose of their wares.

There was a general feeling as of twilight falling. Jolas and *Transition* (upper-case T) were now going in for the "Language of Night," and as I read the inevitable manifestoes on this theme, I could not but think of that Russian émigré mystic, Nicolas Berdiaeff, and his "new Middle Ages": "The night, also, can be beautiful. . . ." A little group of American painters in Paris set out to "paint the night," and one day a number of them came out to my place in the suburbs to ask me to help them prepare a statement of principles. I caught sight of them a number of times with their easels set up on the banks of the Seine after nightfall.

I myself was obsessed by this feeling, and I even in the course of a few months turned out a book to which I gave the title *Night Falls on Europe*. I sent it to an American publisher and he took it with avidity; and then—a thing I never did before or since—I recalled it; for I realized that I was too close up and my book, consequently, was entirely too muddled; what would I think of it ten years later? I got it out of my files and read it again just the other day, and I was very glad that I had not allowed it to be published. In its honest bewilderment it perhaps had some value, but I was ashamed of the confusions that it mirrored, and so I burned it. Yet I think that my state of mind was just about that of the majority of exiles in those years. We were all of us—or practically all—very, very muddled.

This impression deepens as I read over the weekly Paris letters that I contributed, from 1929 to 1933, to the *New York Sun*, and the Italian letters that I sent to the *Saturday Review of Literature*. I was growing in social consciousness, yes, there could be no doubt of that. There had been a time when, as a working newspaperman even, I had not had the least real interest in the front or editorial pages, but only in the literary and art sections; but now, politics was beginning to interest me very much. This could hardly have been avoided and was readily to be explained by the fact that so many of the literary and artistic, the youth and student, movements of Europe had a political tendency if not a definite political direction of one sort or another. Unfortunately, the majority of these movements were extremely confused when not downright reactionary in character; and now and then, as with the group about the French magazine, *Esprit*, the reactionary content was masked by a radical and even pseudo-Marxist idiom.

As for the influence coming out of fascist Italy, that with me is a somewhat personal story; although I do not believe that my case was so very different from that of many others,

including Ezra Pound, who for long had been steeped in Italian culture. With me it all went back to my undergraduate days and a cultivated Italian-American family in whose home I had lived for a considerable time; and for more than ten years before going to Europe, I had assiduously kept up my studies in the language and literature of the peninsula. While residing in France, I paid a number of extended visits to Italy; and during the last three years of my stay, living in the south of France not far from the border, I would frequently run over to Turin or Milan for a long week end.

Being politically more or less unconscious and, like most of the "exiles," consciously asocial in my attitude toward art and society, I was stubbornly bent upon finding in Mussolini's Italy a literature and a culture that were not there. What I found, in reality, was a desert, a cultural waste land—I think of the superb phrase of Georges Bernanos with respect to Franco Spain: "*cimetières sous la lune*"—but it took me some little while to realize this. And so it is not strange if my "Italian Letters," written during this period, make very curious reading. Like Professor Camillo Pellizzi of the University of London, I was apologizing for a vacuum.

The trouble was, of course, that I had not seen the Italian *people*, the real people, but only those intellectuals who had sold out to, or who had gone along with, fascism. I was coming more and more to sense that something was wrong, but I did not know what. It was the Hemingway episode that finally opened my eyes.

I relate my own experiences only for the light they may have to throw on those of others, of Pound and all the rest. We were, I repeat, politically and socially, a muddled lot. And those at home were none too kind. Neither too kind nor too wise in their attitude toward us. Especially certain Left-wing critics. There was the writer in *New Masses* who alluded to us as "Ezra Pound and his little group of fascists." This simply

was not true. Not one of us was a fascist then, not even Ezra; and he was, as far as I know, the only follower of Mussolini or Hitler who was to come out of our troubled ranks.

A "lost generation"? We *had been* lost. From now on it was a question as to whether or not we chose to find ourselves, or—shall we say?—be found by history. Fortunately, the choice for the most part was not left to us. The depression had sent practically all of us home by the mid-'thirties, and the growing social unrest and the looming threat of war in Europe served to round up all but a few stragglers like Pound and Stein; leaving aside the small handful of Americans who, having "gone native," found it unfeasible or impossible to return to the States, even had they wished to do so. Once off the boat in New York, these returning prodigals immediately found themselves engulfed in a strange and swirling America such as they had never known before, even in the giddiest Harding days: an angry, bitter, disillusioned, cynically hardened America that stood at middle-class bars and openly talked "revolution"—even the bartenders!—and yet, with it all, exhibited a humanity, a humane tenderness, that was something quite new.

The artists, writers, intellectuals, had also changed. The "religion of art" appeared to have been lost somewhere along the way; or at least, it was not talked of any more. What one did hear was talk of the necessity of organizing to secure government aid, of mass meetings and mass protests. I myself, a day or two after I landed, scarcely knowing what it was all about as yet, found myself impressed into chairing a meeting of "unemployed writers," and the next day I was one of a committee of three that went down to the Port Authority Building in New York City to demand a writers' project. We were accompanied on our mission by several hundred of our colleagues, and in the crowd I spotted Malcolm Cowley and a number of others of the original band of exiles.

This was typical of what we encountered upon our repatriation. I should hesitate to say whether it made things easier or harder for us. It gave us direction and employment for our energies, which was something we needed at the moment; but it also, until we grew used to it, added to our feeling of strangeness and aloneness. Where before we had been the superior ones, looking down our noses, from our chairs in the Dôme, at the land of Babbitts and Sinclair Lewises three thousand miles and perhaps a decade of years away, we were now made to feel like helpless newcomers who had not as yet acquired a working knowledge of the language of the country.

For this was, assuredly, a new language that we heard spoken all around us: the language of social relationships, and in relation to art and the artist. It was not the tongue that we had spoken at the Dôme or the Select, into which we would now and again lapse, thinking to make an impression on those who had not enjoyed the advantages of the Rive Gauche. It was in vain that we lamented the absence of a stimulating café life in America or praised the Gallic *savoir vivre*; our listeners after a brief uncomprehending glance would, likely as not, go on to speak of some WPA picket line. American literature was entering its short-lived "proletarian" phase and the band-wagon rush was on.

Meanwhile, back in Europe also, writers and intellectuals were lining up on one side or the other of what in those days we called "the barricades." Some like Aragon, Barbusse, and others had gone over to the far Left; others like Yeats, Knut Hamsun, Gerhart Hauptmann, and Drieu La Rochelle to the far Right; while others still, like Unamuno, were floundering in a fatal mire of indecision. We did not realize it, but the France, the Europe, we had known was gone forever.

But this is running a little ahead of the story. The process of reorientation, for the more thoughtful among us at any rate, had in reality begun in France during the last few years of our

"exile." It had begun, as I know from my own and the shared experience of others, in the form of a certain self-questioning, a certain stock-taking, that could not in the nature of things be limited to self but involved an attempt to strike the balance-sheet of a decade and a generation; it involved the entire question of expatriation and cosmopolitanism and the meaning of the word Americanism. A brief extract or two from some of the letters that I wrote to friends in America about this time will serve to show the kind of thinking that I and others were doing in this crepuscular era.

"I have been living these past years, I will not say for the first time in my life, but certainly with a new intensity. I have been undergoing more than one transvaluation of values, not all of them such as I had anticipated, and it is not strange if the result seems to be an utter muddlement. I am not alarmed by this as I should have been once upon a time; one of the things one learns over here is how to wait and the value of waiting; the Old World does not rush like the New. Something, I am sure, is coming out of it all—something *has come* already. . . . My values are becoming more and more inner ones. One doesn't have to run away to Europe to achieve that, but I had to run somewhere, it seemed. . . .

"You in Cincinnati and I in Europe have been working out much the same problem or problems, I believe, insofar as two individuals' problems ever can be the same. Each of us, I think, is endeavoring, not altogether consciously, to rescue himself from the too-American stream. It is so easy to be engulfed and swept along. In our land of Pragmatism and pragmatic sanctions, mere activity may become so all-divine, so illusorily significant and so basically meaningless. I think I can see a new American 'movement,' at least a new generation of young Americans, who will realize the value of spiritual values . . . losing none of their Americanism thereby. For surely America is not to be appropriated by the blind and breathless go-getters.

"Perhaps the greatest discovery I have made on this other continent is that I am, when all is said, an American, hopelessly, irretrievably an American and by no means sorry for it. My Continental 'period' is past. My cosmopolitan curiosity I trust I shall never lose, for that is something that America needs. What I would do is, take all I can from all the world and bring it to America.

"Yes, America looms big to me as it never did before. I have discovered that the abused word patriotism has a meaning, even if it isn't the one given it by Stephen Decatur and the *Chicago Tribune*. What I can never stand for again is seeing little American deracинates and little untraveled Europeans throwing pebbles at my big-breasted country as she sits there beside the water. It is too easy, too obvious, and too futile. It is, in short, silly. I think, too, that the day of the Menckens and the Sinclair Lewises is passing. . . . I don't believe there can be any true satire without tears and there can be no tears without understanding . . . A little faith in this after-the-war-world is not so bad a thing. . . .

"Life here tends to fall into gentle patterns, and this falling-in, for the American who does not know what to do about it, soon becomes, before one knows it, a process of pure vegetation. I don't want to go to seed. Therefore, I think I shall come back to America for certain intervals. . . . I have no desire to be a *déraciné*. Not after inspecting from close up our local 'exile' colony. I don't think I ever could be one; but I shall live and die a cosmopolitan."

It was, perhaps, just because many of us were engaging in some such *examen de conscience* as this that we began to find ourselves, more and more, getting on one another's nerves; we were in a fair way to developing the chronic petulance of the long-term expatriate (a Pound or a Stein). There now developed a tendency to run away from Montparnasse, either to live in solitude somewhere in the provinces (those with work to do had usually found they had to do it somewhere outside

of Paris) or to gather in smaller colonies such as Majorca, Cagnes-sur-Mer, or Mirmande in the Drome, which to the fugitives' dismay proved to be merely miniature Left Banks with all the drawbacks of the Quarter in concentrated form and with the clash of personalities accentuated by the enforced propinquity.

Among the best known of the "runaway" colonies was that of Cagnes-sur-Mer on the Riviera. Kay Boyle, Lawrence Vail, Linc Gillespie, George Antheil, Hilaire Hiler, the Neagoes, the Crosbys, Bob and Rose Brown, were among the many who resided there at one time or another. I never visited Cagnes, but I did know Mirmande, which was the last of them all.

Mirmande is a wholly delightful little village perched on one of the foothills of the Basses-Alpes. It is situated in the ancient province of Dauphiné, the present Département of the Drome, and in the early 1930's had a constantly diminishing population of about 125 persons. At one time, back in the sixteenth century, it had been a thriving town of four or five thousand inhabitants; for it was to Mirmande (old French meaning "See-the-Valley") that François I had the first silk worms imported from Italy, and the village had become the center of the new industry. The thing that dealt it a death-blow was the introduction of rayon. The result was that all the young, able-bodied, and ambitious males had gone away to seek work elsewhere. Many of them had crossed the Rhone to the neighboring province to look for employment on the railroads and factories, leaving behind them chiefly the aged and the infirm.

Now, there is a curious French law which provides that a house is not a house unless it has a roof, and you accordingly do not have to pay taxes on a dwelling without a roof. Taxes in Mirmande seemed very low to an American, fifty francs a year or something like that, but to a Frenchman they were

taxes just the same; and so when they departed, the men of Mirmande were at pains to see that their roofs were removed. This meant that the stone walls would speedily start crumbling, and in a short while what had been an ordinary house would have been converted into a picturesque ruin. Mirmande was a village in ruins, artificial ruins but none the less colorful for all of that. It was, as a matter of fact, the Middle Ages laid in ruins by modern technology; but to the eyes of M. André Lhote and his band of painting students who first "discovered" the place, it was an artists' heaven. There were several Americans in M. Lhote's group and they spread the news, and it was not long before Mirmande was on the expatriate map.

Among the residents of Mirmande in its fleeting prime as an art colony were André and Madame Lhote, Pierre Courthion the art critic, Lewis Stone the American painter and his wife Caroline, Peter and Ann Neagoe, and Eric Waldron the Negro writer. It was here that we got out the last issues of the *New Review*. A number of us bought houses, spending a few thousand francs for one of the "ruins" and expending upon it a thousand or more American dollars to put it in shape for comfortable though not luxurious living. My own house like the others was a pre-Renaissance structure some centuries old; and as I settled down in it, I thought that here at last was my *pied-à-terre*; here was where I would sink my roots. In a place like this, far from America and its skyscrapers, far from Montparnasse, one could really think things out, keep his clarity and his balance, milk his goats of an evening, and be at peace.

It was a dream that did not last very long. Although there were less than a dozen of us besides the villagers at any one time, it would take a first-rate novelist to portray all the petty squabbling and backbiting, all the feuds, all the clash of egos that went on. It was anything but peaceful. Escape, we soon discovered, was not as easy, not as simple as all that. After all, we were still part of a larger world; the mails were still run-

ning, the telegraph and cable functioning, and every week the Graf Zeppelin soared ominously overhead on its regular southern flight.

The absurd contradiction of things came home to me one day as I sat at my desk working on a number of the magazine. I had paused for my ten A.M. *petit déjeuner*, a typical *ouvrier's* breakfast of wine and bread and cheese. From my window I could see in a field not far distant a peasant plowing with oxen, and looking up, I caught sight of the dirigible—it was passing directly above the peasant and his oxen. The Communists in Germany had just polled six million votes. Hitler and his Storm Troopers were on the march, and in France there was uneasy talk of the possibility of a seizure of power by the Nazis. Did that peasant realize the distance of the Graf Zeppelin from his oxen—the distance, and the nearness? If he did not, *I* ought to realize it. My semi-medieval retreat, my "isolation," was as false as the man-made "ruins" about me.

Then, there was my young son. Our children here in Mirmande were growing up speaking only French, and not even good French but a patois which the village four miles away, with a patois of its own, did not understand. It was all right, perhaps, for our generation to be lost, but had we any right to "lose" another? And it was no longer so easy to make a living, if one had to earn his way as I did. We nevertheless stayed on for a year or so, until one day a New York publisher cabled me asking if I could translate a certain book in a month's time. The fee was five hundred dollars, and something told me that this was the last job I would be having; so I accepted it. It was the hardest month's work I ever did in my life. The moment the five hundred dollars was cabled me, I left half of it with my family and took the remaining two hundred and fifty dollars and started for New York via Paris, with one last night in the Quarter of which I remember absolutely nothing except that everybody I ever knew, it seemed, was there.

On the train next day headed for Le Havre—William Blake

and George Reavey between them had somehow got me aboard—I started thinking, thinking about Mirmande and the goats and the old age I would never spend there. I was feeling decidedly tearful, in a self-pitying mood, but New York soon cured me of that. I had expected to find “hard times”; I had been back in the summer of 1931 and things were bad enough then; but I was wholly unprepared for what I found now: writers all around me, and some of the best of them (including one or two of America’s well-known poets) on home relief, starving, organizing, demonstrating. Jobs were unheard-of things, publishers had cut their lists to the bone, and nobody wanted the services of a translator. Fortunately, I had my newspaper experience to fall back upon, and through the kind offices of my friend George Britt of the *World-Telogram*, who procured me a temporary place on the rewrite desk, and of J. G. Grey, literary editor of the *Sun*, who gave me book reviews to do, I contrived to hold on until I had succeeded in persuading another friend, publicity agent for a steamship line, to advance me homeward passage for my wife and child. In this manner I managed to get us all back once more on American soil.

We had started on our ramblings with a baby and a dozen bags of diapers. We had returned without the diapers but with a very frightened small boy who was bravely terrified by the rush and roar of New York’s canyoned streets and who longed for the ramparts of Mirmande on which to play. Our capital, coming and going, was about the same; or was it? That depended on the value we set on the experience. Noticing his parents’ mood, our sensitive offspring lapsed into the Parisian chauffeur’s idiom that he had spoken at the age of three.

“Écoute, mon vieux,” he said to me, “qu'est-ce qu'il y a de cassé?” Which might roughly be interpreted as: “Listen, old man, what the hell's the matter?”

I could not tell him precisely what there was that was “cassé,” but he was to find out soon enough for himself, by

the time he had learned English and had learned how to get along with American children in place of patois-speaking young French peasants.

What has become of all the expatriates, all the "exiles," anyway? This is a question that I often ask myself. They may be found if one looks for them, although they are sometimes hard to trace and they pop up in the most unexpected places. I pick up a book and I find Bob and Rose Brown blithely sailing up the Amazon in an old-fashioned flatboat. In the *New York Post* I am startled to find a column by Wambly Bald—it lacks the sparkle of the old *Vie de Bohème* but is still Wambly; he appears to be headed for the *New Yorker*. Waverley Root is a political columnist and war historian. Henry Miller is the de luxe idol of the undergraduate and the erotica collector. Joseph Stella, who once fought the battle of art with a walking stick at the Dôme, has a Fifty-seventh Street dealer and a well-paying clientele. Linc Gillespie is in a hospital in suburban Philadelphia.

One probably could run them all down if one took the trouble; but this is not what matters. They have all slipped back into American life in one way or another, with greater or less adjustments, and some have become a significant part of it. Insofar as any continuing Left Bank attitude and tradition is concerned, that is to be discovered without much searching in the semipiternal "little" or "young" magazines and especially in such a group as that now gathered around James Laughlin and *New Directions* at Norfolk, Connecticut, with a year-round shrine at Frances Steloff's Gotham Book Mart. These small presses and magazines constitute something like a scattered and invisible Rive Gauche in America, populated by irreconcilable and unreconstructed "exiles" whose refuge still is the Ivory Tower of art uncontaminated by society. Greenwich Village also has reclaimed a few.

On the other hand, there are many former expatriates who,

in sharp contrast to their attitude of fifteen or twenty years ago, have become militant liberals, and some even will be found on the far Left.

How do we feel about it all? is another question that may be asked of us. Do we still nurse our nostalgias and long for those café terraces of old, the *fines* and the pernods and Jimmy the Barman and the Sphinx and the little free-lance prostitutes of the Quarter?

I suppose we do at times; but I think the wiser of us are now inclined to smile a bit as age always smiles at youth—without, however (if age is wise), denying the necessity and the worth of youth's proverbial fling, the right of a generation to be "lost," even, if it damned well chooses to be. What we do miss, I should say, without being unduly sentimental about it, is that companionship of which Hemingway has spoken that comes at the end of a hard day's work when a man, with no need of a prearranged appointment, may drop down at a café table and talk to someone who speaks his language—if not shop talk, that lingo of life that is not to be learned from any grammar or lexicon. The American cocktail bar is hardly a satisfactory substitute.

The artist and writer in America, the truth is, has always been a lonely creature, and this loneliness has been erected into a tradition which is not easy to overcome. The group spirit as it exists in France is unknown here—the group spirit and the group loyalty—and with it is lost much of the fun that goes with schools and feuds and manifestoes. I cannot imagine a pair of Fifty-seventh Street exhibitors staging such a duel as that which Joe Stella and Ary Stillman put on at the Dôme. But these are merely the amusing accompaniments; something a good deal deeper is lost to the community in the influence upon American life that artists, writers, and intellectuals might exert if they combined forces to such an end. It is only in recent years that they have begun to learn this.

Was the experience of "exile" worthwhile? To us? To

America? The answer to both questions is, I believe: Yes. As Harold Stearns put it in his reply to Sinclair Lewis: "The chief good point, of course, is that remotely, somehow, somewhere, even the dumbest of American expatriates have been touched by the spiritual forces of French life." And by something more, I would add, than French life: by the discovery, first, of a larger world, and then of the fact that America is a part of that world. Something that the Menckens and the Lewises never tried to teach us, the value of which may be plainly seen today in this age of atom bombs.

But it was to America that we came back. It is to one's own America, wherever it may be, that one always does come back. *Weh dem, der keine Heimat hat!*

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